

THESIS STATEMENTS

What is a thesis statement?

A good essay will argue a point of view. The argument of the paper is summed up in one sentence, called the thesis statement. The thesis statement should work as a one line summary of what the paper will be arguing, and is usually presented in two parts: the topic, and then the point of view that you will be arguing concerning that topic. This is presented in the introduction, and is usually the last sentence of the paragraph.

Often, students forget to include the second part of the thesis statement, which is the point of view, or, the argument, and they just present the topic. Think of the thesis statement as an algebraic equation:

$$\begin{array}{ccccc}
 a & + & b & = & c \\
 \uparrow & & \uparrow & & \uparrow
 \end{array}$$

The first "unknown" is the TOPIC. What will you be talking about in your essay?

The second "unknown" is the POINT OF VIEW, or the ARGUMENT. What will you be saying about your topic?

The "sum" of these two parts becomes a complete THESIS STATEMENT. If you are missing "a" or "b," then you do not have a complete thesis statement.

NO **Missing the Topic ("a")**
Solving problems is difficult.

NO **Missing the Argument ("b")**
There are many environmental problems.

YES **(TOPIC)** **(ARGUMENT)**
Solving Montreal's environmental problems is more difficult than many environmentalists believe.

NO **Missing the Topic ("a")**
People poison the environment.

NO **Missing the Argument ("b")**
People use lawn chemicals.

YES **(TOPIC)** **(ARGUMENT)**
People poison the environment with chemicals merely to keep their lawns nice.

Making sure that you follow the 'algebraic equation' idea when writing your thesis statement should help you avoid making vague statements or mere observations. Take a look at some other rules you should follow when writing a thesis statement.

Make an Assertion, Not an Observation or Fact

NO Ernest Hemingway's novel, The Old Man and the Sea, is about a fisherman and a fish.

YES In his novel The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway uses a fisherman's efforts at catching a fish as a symbol to represent the futility of chasing one's dreams.

Be Specific, Never Vague

NO The novel The Old Man and the Sea is good.

YES In the novel The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway effectively uses language techniques to develop a new writing style.

It Should Be Limited and Narrow, Not Broad

NO Drugs are being used to treat all mental illnesses.

YES Due to its risks and negative side effects, the drug lithium is not an effective way to treat depression.

It Should Have One Main Point, Not Several

NO Stephen Hawking's physical disability has not prevented him from becoming a world-renowned physicist, and his book is the subject of a movie.

YES Stephen Hawking's physical disability has not prevented him from becoming a world-renowned physicist.

It's okay if you have to revise your thesis statement as you're writing the paper. If you are having trouble coming up with arguments to support your thesis, it is much easier to change the thesis than to change the entire paper. It often happens that a writer only realizes the point or direction of the paper during the process of writing the paper, so let yourself feel comfortable altering the thesis; it is not set in stone. Just make sure that your final thesis statement properly reflects what you have written about in the essay.