

Thesis Statements

WHY DO I NEED A THESIS?

- To provide your reader with a "guide" to your essay
- To give yourself a focus and better organize and develop your argument/ideas
- To test your ideas by condensing them into a sentence or two

DO I NEED A THESIS IF MY PAPER IS NOT AN ARGUMENT?

Most likely. Every paper should have a purpose, which is stated in the thesis. In papers other than argumentative research papers, your thesis statement might look like these:

Reflective: Although moving around from school to school gave me an unstable start to my academic career, each school had one teacher who helped me figure out what I wanted to do in life.

Expository: In his book, Dennis Baker builds on Smith and West's findings about plant life in similar environments to support his argument that the extinction of lichen will dramatically affect the Arctic tundra ecosystem.

Whatever type of paper you're writing, it is important to think beyond an assignment sheet and ask yourself, WHAT is the significance of my paper's conclusions and WHY should my audience care?

ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis for an argument paper needs to have a claim and support.

Claim

Support [Banana Herb Tea Supplement poses a potential danger to customers because according to several studies, it promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, which is unsafe.

(adapted from http://www.indiana.edu/rwts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml)

Note that your thesis does not necessarily have to be arranged with the claim first and the support second. Play around with ways of wording your thesis to emphasize a certain point or indicate your paper's structure.

ATTRIBUTES OF A STRONG THESIS STATEMENT (in any paper)

Academic Language: Do not use first-person language (I, me, my, we) unless the paper is about you. Also, avoid phrases such as "My essay will..." unless your instructor asks you to phrase your thesis that way.

My paper will address the economics of our space program. = WEAK

(First-person, informal language.)

Adding to the findings, the U.S. space program has a very high cost without any substantial or practical returns to the public. = STRONGER

(Third-person, academic language)

Specificity: Avoid thesis statements that are so broad that you can only cover surface level information; pick a narrow enough topic to go in-depth. Also, avoid vague statements. The more detailed and specific the language, the stronger the thesis statement.

There are many things to consider when deciding whether or not to give kids more screen time. = WEAK

(What things should you consider? What decision will the writer recommend? The argument is vague.)

Parents must identify their own child's personality and make screen time decisions based on prior behavior and habits. = STRONGER

(The thesis zooms in on one aspect of the topic and takes a clearly identifiable stance.)

Justifies Discussion: A strong thesis should be relevant and add to an intellectual discussion. If the thesis just argues for something that most people already agree on, then there is no real significance to the essay. It is good if reasonable people disagree with your argument or paper because that is what makes your paper relevant and compelling to read.

Shakespeare was a great playwright. = WEAK

(Almost everyone agrees with this; not a compelling thesis.)

The female characters in Shakespeare's Hamlet are portrayed negatively in limited roles, where women have no chance for redemption, and are subject to the decisions that men make for them. = STRONGER

(People may agree or disagree, making the thesis more interesting.)

(adapted from <http://www.paperstarter.com/hamlet.htm>)

Has One Main Idea: A thesis should be more than a list of all the sub-ideas in your paper. A thesis should have one main idea that connects all the other ideas in your paper together.

In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain has scenes on the river and on the shore, and he also talks about civilization and nature. = WEAK

(The two ideas are not clearly connected.)

Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature. = STRONGER

(The two ideas are clearly linked to form a main idea for the paper.)