

Thesis Statements

The thesis statement is typically a one-sentence statement of the central idea your paper focuses on. Whether an essay argues, explains, or describes, readers need a concise statement that sums up the essay's purpose. The following section outlines a process for developing a sound thesis statement.

Develop Your Thesis by Starting with Your Topic

What do you find interesting about your topic? Maybe just one part of it is intriguing; or, perhaps the topic itself makes many thoughts come to mind. Take a moment to think about how you respond to the topic—and value your perspective! This is a sign that you are intellectually engaged. You'll write more passionately when you are involved.

Write a General Thesis Statement to Guide Your First Draft

Write a general statement, such as "I'm interested in Erikson's theory of personality development because it explains some of my high school experiences." Write to explore your thoughts and ideas. This is an important stage to make connections, ask questions, and engage the topic. Don't censor yourself, edit your thoughts, or worry about using formal academic language: just write.

Refine Your Thesis After You Write a Draft

Stop and read your draft. What is the main idea you discuss? Your thesis may need change to reflect this idea. For example, if you wrote about Erikson's theory of personality and found you focused primarily on one state, your new thesis might say, "Erikson's fifth stage of personality development, identity versus role development, explains my deviant behavior in high school."

Let Research Focus Your Thesis

Research helps you make more connections in your paper. You can change your thesis from an "I oriented" statement to an academically acceptable statement such as "Erikson's fifth state of personality development, identity versus role development, accounts for what is seen as deviant behavior by highly talented and motivated adolescents." Let your writing process guide your thesis statement.

Thesis Statement Checklist

Examine your thesis statement: does it encompass the following characteristics?

- A thesis is a declarative statement, not a question.
 - Weak: What are effective prevention strategies for feline AIDS?
 - Strong: To prevent feline AIDS, cat owners should keep their cats indoors as much as possible.
- A thesis takes a stand; it does not just state a fact.
 - Weak: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales contains stories told by pilgrims traveling to St. Thomas as Becket's shrine.
 - Strong: Chaucer employs the pilgrimage framework in the Canterbury Tales as a metaphor for the storyteller's quest for the perfectly told narrative.
- A thesis states a position on a topic; the title and introduction announce the topic.
 - Weak: This paper explores American's dependence on fossil fuels and hesitance to develop alternative energy sources
 - Better: America's dependence on fossil fuels is keeping it from developing alternative energy sources

For more information, visit http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/thesis_composedraft.html