Writing Tips

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis is a sentence, generally located in the introduction, that explicitly states the topic and purpose for your essay.

Before starting the drafting process, it is a good idea to start with a working thesis statement. This working thesis is a draft that helps you focus during the early stages of the writing process and can be changed at any point while drafting and revising.

Tips for Developing a Thesis Statement

1. Determine what kind of paper you are being asked to write:
   - Analysis – in an analytical paper you break down an issue or idea into its component parts, evaluate the idea, and present this breakdown and evaluation to the audience
   - Exposition – in an expository essay, you explain or describe some thing, place, person, or event to the audience
   - Argument – in an argumentative assignment, you make a rational claim about a topic and justify this claim with specific evidence to logically convince your readers that your claim is true.

2. A thesis is an assertion, NOT a statement of fact or observation.

   Fact or Observation: People use many lawn chemicals.
   
   Assertion: People are poisoning the environment with chemicals simply to keep their lawns beautiful.

3. A thesis is NOT an announcement. Never begin with announcement phrases like, “This paper will explore...” , “The thesis of my essay is...” , “My paper is about...” , etc.

4. A thesis should NOT be a question.; instead, the thesis should be an answer to a question.

5. A thesis statement is narrow, rather than broad. If the thesis statement is sufficiently narrow, it can be fully supported and cover the scope of your assignment. But remember it should not be too narrow other-wise you cannot fully
How Should I Write a Thesis Statement?

The structure and nature of your thesis statement will depend on the type of paper you are writing, so there is not really a trick to thesis statements that works every time. However, below you will find some strategies that will help you develop strong thesis statements.

⇒ **Claim + Reason = Thesis Statement**

This is an easy formula to remember to help you ensure that you have included both elements of the thesis statement. The claim is the assertion or main idea that you are making. Then, you will want to make sure you that you include the reason or support for that claim. A nice word to substitute for the + part of the equation is “because.” You don’t have to use this exact word or this style every time, but it often works quite well.

**Example:** You might be writing a paper on sexist language in textbooks and state this thesis: “Sexist language in college textbooks is harmful.” This is a good start and makes clear the claim part of your thesis. However, to make it more powerful and specific, try adding in the “because clause” and reason: “Sexist language in college textbooks is harmful because it reinforces negative stereotypes about many groups and individuals.” The section of the sentence after “because” makes clear the reason to support your claim, so you now have claim + reason = thesis statement.

⇒ **The Working Thesis Statement**

The best thesis statements will evolve as your paper progresses, so try using a “working thesis statement.” Have a basic idea of your thesis statement before you begin writing your paper, but be willing to change and revise it as your paper changes. Often, the conclusion you draw before starting a paper may be different than the conclusion you make after you research and write your paper. This is a good thing—it means that you learned something during the writing process!

**Example:** Before you being the writing process, you might have this working thesis statement: “Many women suffer from eating disorders.” While this is a good start on your thesis, it needs more work and more complexity. Thus, after researching this issue and writing about it, you might have the following thesis in your final draft: “Magazine ads and commercials can ultimately influence how women see themselves and how they behave and can lead to harmful behaviors such as eating disorders.”

⇒ **The “So What” Question**

Many times, writers will write what they think is a powerful thesis statement and, in fact, that statement makes no real argumentative assertion. This means that your reader may ask “so what?”

**Example:** You might state, “Many people in the world are victims of stereotyping.” While this may be a true statement, as a reader, I would ask, “so what?” What is so important or problematic about the fact that people are stereotyped? What more can you add to your conclusion or argument to make it more interesting and more complex?