WRITING A THESIS

What is a thesis statement? Every essay should have a main point, a main idea, or central message. The argument(s) a writer makes in her or his paper should reflect this main idea. The sentence that captures the writer’s position on this main idea is what we call a thesis statement.

How long is a thesis statement? A thesis statement is one sentence. The topic is presented as well as a comment about a position in relation to a topic. The thesis tells the reader what the paper is about, guides the writer as she or he is writing and focuses on the argument.

Where is the thesis statement? The thesis statement is written in the introduction, usually at the end.

- Be as clear and as specific as possible; avoid vague words.
- Indicate the point of your paper but avoid sentence structures like, “The point of my paper is…” Are there two large statements connected loosely by a coordinating conjunction (i.e. "and," "but," "or," "for," "nor," "so," "yet")?
- Would a subordinating conjunction help (i.e. "through," "although," "because," "since") to signal a relationship between the two sentences?
- Or do the two statements imply a fuzzy unfocused thesis?
- If so, settle on one single focus and then proceed with further development.

A thesis should present the topic so that readers can get straight to the point. Being specific will be much more successful than writing about general things that do not say much. The opposite of a focused and narrow thesis is a broad, sprawling, and superficial thesis. Compare these original theses (too general) with three possible revisions (more focused, each presenting a different approach to the same topic):

- **Original thesis:**
  - There are serious objections to today's horror movies.

- **Revised theses:**
  - Because modern cinematic techniques have allowed filmmakers to get more graphic, horror flicks have desensitized young American viewers to violence.
  - The pornographic violence in "bloodbath" slasher movies degrades both men and women.
  - Today's slasher movies fail to deliver the emotional catharsis that 1930s horror films did.
- Avoid technical language. Always avoid jargon.
- Avoid vague words such as "interesting," "negative," "exciting," "unusual," and "difficult."
- Avoid abstract words such as "society," "values," or "culture."
- Avoid merely announcing the topic; your original and specific "angle" should be clear. In this way you will tell your reader why your take on the issue matters.
  - Original thesis: In this paper, I will discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood.
  - Revised thesis: Not just empty stories for kids, fairy tales shed light on the psychology of young children.
- Avoid making universal or pro/con judgments that oversimplify complex issues.
  - Original thesis: We must save the whales.
  - Revised thesis: Because our planet's health may depend upon biological diversity, we should save the whales.
- When you make a (subjective) judgment call, specify and justify your reasoning. “Just because” is not a good reason for an argument.
  - Revised thesis: If the government takes over industry in Kenya, the industry will become more efficient.
- Avoid merely reporting a fact. Say more than what is already proven fact. Go further with your ideas. Otherwise… why would your point matter?
  - Original thesis: Former President Nixon’s administration was rocked by scandal.
  - Revised thesis: The many scandals of Nixon’s administration revealed basic problems with the Republican Party's nominating process.