



THE THESIS STATEMENT

A **thesis statement** is a single sentence which expresses the idea an essay will develop. It points both the writer and reader in a definite direction. A good thesis statement is restricted, unified, and precise and deals with only ONE dominant idea. It limits the essay to one issue.

Maybe you've found yourself in this conversation before:

Student: "Professor Jones, here's my five-page essay that's due next week."

Prof: "Thanks, Chris. But I'm too busy to read over your paper right now. Send me a one-sentence email that states what your entire essay is about, and then we'll get together for a discussion."

Point: THAT ONE-SENTENCE EMAIL IS YOUR THESIS STATEMENT!

The thesis statement must be a statement, not a question or a phrase. Once you have chosen your subject, make an assertion about that subject. Use strong nouns, verbs and adjectives instead of weak words like *is*, *are*, *good*, *interesting*, *nice*.

PURPOSE OF THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement declares the main purpose of the entire essay, answering the questions "What is my opinion?" OR "What will I illustrate, define, explain or argue in this essay?"

IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THE FIRST SENTENCE YOU WRITE WHEN YOU BEGIN YOUR PAPER. IT TAKES SOME THOUGHT, SO DON'T GET BOGGED DOWN TRYING TO PERFECT YOUR THESIS STATEMENT BEFORE YOU BEGIN TO WRITE!

LIMIT THE SUBJECT

Note how a student might narrow "music" down to size:

The important place music had in our high school
to
Our high school marching band
to
My first week with our high school marching band
to
The day I won the tryout for the marching band

These are possible subjects or topics. Now the student must write a sentence (thesis statement) which states the focus of the essay.

Making the marching band increased my confidence.

or

When I made the marching band, I decided to major in music.

BE PRECISE

Finding the right thesis statement is sometimes like fishing; you may have to throw many back before you hook a satisfactory one. Consider the following thesis statements, in two versions:

WEAK: There are serious objections to compulsory health insurance.
(What objections will be presented?)

STRONG: Compulsory health insurance will bankrupt small businesses.

WEAK: Winston Churchill had a colorful career.
("Colorful" could mean anything. Thesis doesn't narrow topic.)

STRONG: Winston Churchill's wartime leadership empowered the British people.

WEAK: The United Nations has major weaknesses and cannot prevent war.
(This statement requires writer to cover two topics, not one.)

STRONG: Because the United Nations is ineffectual, it should be abolished.

WEAK: My English instructor is the most interesting teacher in this school.
("Interesting" is too vague and does not establish a purpose.)

STRONG: Professor Smith deserves the Meramec Outstanding Teaching award.

SUMMARY

In developing your thesis statement, remember these points:

A GOOD THESIS

states a clearly defined opinion
asserts one main idea
is narrowed to fit assignment
uses specific, concrete terms
says something worthwhile

A POOR THESIS

is unclear or illogical
contains two or more ideas
merely states a fact
is phrased as a question
makes general statements

