

Thesis Statements

Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

The thesis statement focuses the essay by stating the main idea of the paper and limiting the topic. A thesis is often only one sentence in length, though it may be longer for some assignments. Most readers expect to find your thesis at the end of the introduction, where it gains emphasis.

Elements of a Thesis Statement

Tailor your thesis to the specific assignment, but typically a good thesis will **state a qualified assertion**. Most thesis statements will also **indicate the organization** of the paper.

States a Qualified Assertion

For a persuasive or argumentative assignment, you must make an assertion that you can support, rather than simply stating a fact or an observation (for example, “computers are used in many households”).

A strong thesis also avoids making an absolute claim, such as “All children need protection from inappropriate internet content.” Statements that include words like “all,” “none,” “always,” or “never” require only one counterexample to be proved false. See the example in the section below for a stronger thesis.

Indicates Organization (Depends on Assignment)

Most assignments require that you outline the subpoints of your argument in your thesis. In this case, the subpoints in your thesis should be listed in the same order that they are discussed in the paper.

THESIS: In order to protect their children from violence and pornography, parents need to use internet filters, set time limits on computer use, and control the rating of computer games allowed at home.

- OUTLINE:
- I. Introduction
 - II. Parents should use internet filters to make sure their children aren’t going to destructive sites.
 - III. Setting computer time limits will help minimize the risk of children exploring inappropriate sites or games, especially when the children are bored.
 - IV. In order to reduce the influence of virtual violence, parents must control the ratings of the games their children are playing.
 - V. Conclusion

Developing a Thesis Statement

Most thesis statements develop over the course of your research or writing process as you make more discoveries, so the final version of your thesis may not appear until you’ve revised it several times. If you’re having problems developing your thesis, identify the main idea of each body paragraph and build the thesis from those supporting details.

Say you have narrowed your topic to screenwriters of movies based on comic books. Your process might look something like this:

- **Begin with a draft thesis using the topic and the main point.** A draft thesis will help give you an idea of what you have and what you want to say.

EXAMPLE: Writers who base their screenplays on comic books have it easy.

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- **Explore your topic to incorporate other perspectives.** Either through research or reflection, consider other sides to your argument. Although it may seem counterintuitive, do not ignore evidence that makes your thesis more difficult to argue.

EXAMPLE: Screenwriters demonstrate some creativity in adapting comic books to a new format, however, they still have it easier than writers who create everything from scratch.
- **Refine your final thesis.** Finally, make sure your thesis is specific and that it matches the paper. If parts of your paper wander away from the thesis, you can cut or modify those sections, change the thesis, or both.

EXAMPLE: While comic book movies need writers to be creative in adapting the material to a new format, the screenwriters do not show originality because they use previously written material, incorporate existing storyboards, and simply manipulate pre-created characters.

Creating a Thesis with Complexity

Assignments often ask you to consider the complexity of an issue even while arguing a position. *From Inquiry to Academic Writing* gives three useful strategies for creating a thesis that acknowledges complexity (Greene and Lidinsky 101-103).

Grammatical structures and words like “although” and “however” can highlight the argumentative nature of your thesis and show tension between contrasting ideas, as the examples below illustrate.

Correcting Misinterpretation

In this type of thesis, you base your argument on the same evidence that others have used with regards to a topic, but the conclusions you draw from that evidence differ.

EXAMPLE: Although many interpret the correlation between aggressive behavior and violent video games to mean that video games cause aggression, multiple studies suggest that video games do not create aggression but rather that players with high aggression gravitate toward violent games.

Filling the Gap

In this type of thesis, you identify a subject that, in your opinion, needs more attention and research to fully address its significance.

EXAMPLE: Although several studies address the over-diagnosis of mental disorders in children, more research is necessary to examine the link between these unnecessary diagnoses and the increase of prescription drug abuse among adolescents.

Modifying What Others Have Said

In this type of thesis, you examine an opinion with which you agree **to a point**, and then discuss how you would alter that opinion to make it more logical, feasible, or agreeable.

EXAMPLE: In his article, Johnson makes a strong case for the use of electronics in the classroom, but in order for his suggestions to be feasible, his arguments must take into account the current development of educational software, the necessary alterations to a course curriculum incorporating electronics, and the monetary investment required to implement electronic learning tools.