

Thesis Statements

WHY DO I NEED A THESIS?

- To provide your reader with a "guide" to your essay
- To give yourself a focus and better organize and develop your argument/ideas
- To test your ideas by condensing them into a sentence or two

DO I NEED A THESIS IF MY PAPER IS NOT AN ARGUMENT?

Most likely. Every paper should have a purpose, which is stated in the thesis. In papers other than argumentative research papers, your thesis statement might look like these:

Reflective: Although moving around from school to school gave me an unstable start to my academic career, each school had one teacher who helped me figure out what I wanted to do in life.

Expository: In his book, Dennis Baker uses builds on Smith and West's findings about plant life in similar environments to support his argument that the extinction of lichen will dramatically affect the Arctic tundra ecosystem.

Whatever type of paper you're writing, it is important to think beyond an assignment sheet and ask yourself, WHAT is the significance of my paper's conclusions and WHY should my audience care?

ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis for an argument paper needs to have a claim and support.

Claim

Support

Banana Herb Tea Supplement poses a potential danger to customers because according to several studies, it promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, which is unsafe.

(adapted from http://www.indiana.edurwts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml)

Note that your thesis does not necessarily have to be arranged with the claim first and the support second. Play around with ways of wording your thesis to emphasize a certain point or indicate your paper's structure.

ATTRIBUTES OF A STRONG THESIS STATEMENT (in any paper)

Academic Language: Do not use first-person language (I, me, my, we) unless the paper is about you. Also, never use phrases such as "I think that..." or "My essay will..."

My paper will address the economics of our space program. = WEAK

(First-person, informal language.)

Adding to the findings, the U.S. space program has a very high cost without any substantial or practical returns to the public. = STRONGER

(Third-person, academic language)

Specificity: Avoid thesis statements that are too broad to where you can only cover surface level information; pick a narrow enough topic to go in-depth. Also, avoid vague statements. The more detailed and specific the language, the stronger the thesis statement.

The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different. = WEAK

(Language too broad and vague)

While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government. = STRONGER

(Narrowed topic and specific language)

(adapted from <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements>)

Justifies Discussion: A strong thesis should be relevant and add to an intellectual discussion. If the thesis just argues for something that most people already agree on, than there is no real significance to the essay. It is good if reasonable people disagree with your argument or paper because that is what makes your paper relevant and compelling to read.

Shakespeare was a great playwright. = WEAK

(Everyone agrees with this; not a compelling thesis.)

The female characters in Shakespeare's Hamlet are portrayed negatively in limited roles, where women have no chance for redemption, and are subject to the decisions that men make for them. = STRONGER

(People may agree or disagree, making the thesis more interesting.)

(adapted from <http://www.paperstarter.com/hamlet.htm>)

Has One Main Idea: A thesis should be more than a list of all the sub-ideas in your paper. A thesis should have one main idea that connects all the other ideas in your paper together.

Smoking is bad for the public's health and taxes are taking advantage of people's weaknesses. = WEAK

(The two ideas are not connected.)

Nicotine use is a damaging, addictive compulsion, which means profiting from taxing nicotine products is the same as taking advantage of people's addiction and weaknesses; therefore, nicotine products shouldn't be regulated for a profit but legalized for the public's safety. = STRONGER

(The two ideas are clearly linked to form a main idea for the paper.)