How to Write a Thesis Statement

Essays without thesis statements are easy for your teacher to grade: simply write an 'F' at the top of the paper, laugh, and shuffle up the next paper. Unfortunately, essays without thesis statements demonstrate a lack of proficiency by the student and teacher.

What is a Thesis Statement?

Students have heard the term thesis statement hundreds of times by the time they reach high school, yet have only a vague understanding of what one is.

A thesis statement presents your opinions or thoughts on a subject or an issue. You cannot write an essay without one.

A thesis statement must contain a subject + an opinion.

A thesis statement answers the topic question (the one you created or the one presented to you by the instructor).

TIP: A thesis statement should never contain the following: in my opinion, I think, I believe, etc.

How to Plan Your Thesis Statement

Before writing a thesis statement, the writer must be aware of his or her audience and purpose. Unclear thesis statements emanate from the minds of writers with an unclear purpose.

You must begin with a topic question. If your instructor has assigned an essay question to answer, this step has been done for you. If you are doing a research paper, take time to come up with a good topic question.

You must form an opinion and state it clearly. Do not be wishy-washy.

Be sure you have approached your evidence fairly, without bias.

Consider both sides of a controversial issue.

Once you've established the topic question, a clear position, and objectivity, you're ready to write a thesis statement.

Good Thesis Statements

There is a difference between writing a thesis statement

and writing a good thesis statement. These instructions will help you write the latter.

1. A good thesis statement is short and simple: it should be no longer than one sentence, regardless of essay length.

Good Example: Success is a result of doing the right things consistently.

Bad Example: In a world full of success gurus and books about success, it becomes ever so more important to delineate the one trait that ultimately determines success: doing the right things consistently.

2. A good thesis statement is limited to one main idea.

Good example: The key to successful dieting is focusing on a specific goal.

Bad example: The key to successful dieting is focusing on a specific goal, which is also the key to successfully running a business and coaching a football team.

3. A good thesis statement is a declarative sentence with no qualifiers (might, maybe, perhaps, etc.):

Good example: Draymond Green's ability to score, pass, and rebound make him the league's most valuable player.

Bad example: Does Lebron James' ability to score, pass, and rebound make him the league's most valuable player?

Bad Example: Lebron James' ability to score, pass, and rebound just might make him the league's most valuable player.

How to Write a Good Thesis Statement

Knowing what a good thesis statement looks like and knowing how to write a good thesis statement are not the same. The following steps will help you and your students write a good thesis statement.

Write several trial thesis statements: writing is a process, so is writing a thesis statement.
If you're having trouble deciding which side to take on a controversial issue, write your thesis statement from two different points of view. Then decide which one better represents your opinion. If you still can't decide, list facts on both sides of the issue and decide which facts make a more persuasive argument.

Evaluating Your Thesis Statement

Use the following questions after writing a thesis statement to evaluate it.

Have you answered the question or merely restated it? The following examples are based on this question: Does Romeo's prior feelings for Rosaline diminish the credibility of his love for Juliet?

Good example: Romeo's prior feelings for Rosaline diminish the credibility of his love for Juliet.

Bad example: This essay examines whether or not Romeo's prior feelings for Rosaline diminishes his love for Juliet.

Have you tried to argue both sides of the case? It is important to acknowledge the other side and address the other position. That does not, however, excuse you from choosing a side.

Good example: Juliet was not the first woman to capture Romeo's fancy; she was, however, the one who affected him the most.

Bad example: Romeo loved Juliet with all his heart, but he loved Rosaline too; It could be argued they were both his favorite.

Have you prejudged the issue by using loaded language? Immature writers manipulate readers through emotionally-charged language.

Bad example: Immature, whiny, male-pig Romeo, a male harlot, ruined precious Juliet whom he loved no more than Rosaline.