

Writing a Clear Thesis Statement

Definition: The thesis statement is the one sentence in your essay that conveys the central idea. It is the one sentence that tells your reader what your essay is about. It is the ONE sentence in your essay that addresses your topic directly and states the main point of the essay.

Every expository essay must have a thesis statement. When you write essays, especially in English, history, psychology, sociology, or philosophy classes, you want your thesis statement to be clear and obvious to your reader. Your reader is, in most cases, your instructor.

A good (notice, "good" not "great") thesis statement accomplishes two tasks:

1. Addresses each element of your topic directly.
2. Tells your reader the main point (YOUR main point as it relates to the topic) of your essay.

These two tasks **MUST** be accomplished in your thesis statement: Address the topic and state the main point.

Where to Place a Thesis Statement

You know what a thesis statement is. Now the question becomes, "Where do I put it?" There are, generally, two opinions as to where a writer should place a thesis statement: As the first sentence of the introductory paragraph or as the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

There is no rule about the placement of a thesis statement. However, in most college-level essays, you should place your thesis statement as the last sentence of your introductory paragraph. Some students may wonder, "Professor, if there's no rule, why should it matter?" My answer is this: An effective writer is always conscious of his or her audience. In most cases, high school and college instructors want the thesis statement of an expository essay to be the **LAST** sentence of the introduction. Additionally, a reader understands the thesis statement better if she or he has some notion of its context rather than if she or he reads it abruptly in the first sentence of an essay.

Syntactic Structure of Thesis Statement

Let's take a look at a structure for a thesis statement that addresses the following topic:

Topic: A Place You Would Like to Visit But May Not Appeal to Others

We know that a thesis statement has to do two things:

1. addresses the topic and
2. states the main point of your essay.

Well, it seems that the topic asks you to write about a place. You might like to visit this place, but others may not. So the thesis statement has to address these two elements. As an example, let's pick Paris, the capital of France. I might want to visit Paris because of its museums, architecture, food, churches, and parks. Why might some people NOT want to visit Paris? Well, some people may think it's too crowded. Others may be afraid of the language barrier.

So we have two thoughts going, both of which must be covered in the thesis.

Thesis Statement: Although some people may fear visiting Paris because of a perceived language barrier and large population, I would like to visit Paris because of its multitude of cultural activities.

Notice that we made one idea subordinate (less important) to the main idea. The main idea is that I would like to visit Paris. The subordinate idea is that some may fear visiting Paris. The use of a subordinating conjunction makes the relationship between the two clauses clear. So when you develop this essay, you might have one body paragraph on the fears people may have about visiting Paris and two or three body paragraphs on why you want to.

Take a look at a good handout on thesis statements from the University of North Carolina's online writing center.

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>

Try writing some thesis statements with these topics.

- One person who seems to have two sides to his or her personality
- A favorite place from your childhood
- A dangerous activity that people participate in despite the risks
- A cause or organization that deserves our support
- An historical period in which you would like to have lived