Thesis Statements

Your thesis statement comes at the end of your introduction paragraph and accomplishes three tasks:

1. Clearly states the main argument of the paper.
2. Clearly states how you will defend your argument using evidence.
3. Acts as a map of the paper both for the reader and for yourself (as you write it).

Your thesis should be original; do not include quotes or facts in your thesis statement. The goal of any research or argumentative paper is not to simply report facts about a topic, but to assert an educated claim, or opinion, based on research and critical thinking and defend that claim by persuasively using available evidence. Your thesis should also be debatable, meaning that it should have a counterargument. A statement that has no counterargument is simply a fact.

Writing a Thesis Statement

Asking Questions

Writing a thesis begins by asking questions about your topic. For most assignments, the prompt given by your instructor may list some questions about an assigned topic; the questions might look like this:

*What are the major problems related to your topic? Who or what is responsible, and who is being affected? Has anybody tried to solve the problem? If so, what have the results been? Is a more effective solution required; if so, what? How will the solution be implemented? What potential drawbacks to the solution exist, and how can these drawbacks be minimized?*

The answer to any set of research questions will be your thesis statement. You need not limit your thesis statement to one sentence; in fact, two sentences are ideal.

Examples of Thesis Statements

After you’ve read the questions, write down a working thesis. It does not have to be final, but it should make an arguable claim and demonstrate how you plan to defend it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Thesis Statement</th>
<th>Level of Quality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Global warming refers to the rising temperature of the Earth as a result of carbon emissions from fossil fuels.</td>
<td>Not a thesis because it is a statement of fact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global warming is a problem that needs to be addressed.</td>
<td>A weak thesis; it consists of an arguable claim (“Global warming is a problem”), but it is unclear why global warming is a problem, how the author proposes to solve the problem, and what evidence the author will use to defend this claim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contrary to the counterclaims of climate change deniers, global warming must be reversed if the planet is to remain habitable. This can happen by substituting fossil fuels with cleaner, more efficient energy sources such as wind and nuclear power.</td>
<td>A working thesis statement; it makes a claim, explains why the claim should be supported, and gives the reader a preview of what evidence will be used to defend the claim.</td>
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Conducting Research

Once you have your working thesis, begin to conduct research. As you research, you will develop a better understanding of the topic’s nuances. Not only will you better understand the arguments supporting your stance, but you will also be forced to grapple with opposing arguments, as well as third or fourth (and so on) perspectives that you may not have considered before.

Please refer to our Literature Review guide on the ASC Student Toolkit for more advice on making connections between different sources and between sources and your research questions.

Revising the Thesis

If, after conducting research, you stand by your original thesis, think of ways to refute opposing arguments. However, if your stance on the topic happens to change, be sure to adjust your thesis accordingly. No need to worry if this happens; it simply means that you have approached the topic with an open mind and can now think about it in a more critical and nuanced way. The best thing to do when you find that research contradicts your original thesis is to take what the evidence gives you and work with it, not against it.

Using the Thesis as a Map for your Paper

A thesis should act as a map for your paper for both the reader and yourself. For example, take our sample thesis statement from earlier:

Contrary to the counterclaims of climate change deniers, global warming must be reversed if the planet is to remain habitable. This can happen by substituting fossil fuels with cleaner, more efficient energy sources such as wind and nuclear power.

From the information available in the thesis, the reader can assume that the author will do the following, in order, throughout the paper: 1.) identify the problem; 2.) discuss the consequences; 3.) suggest solutions; and 4.) refute counterclaims. Thus, a well-written thesis should signal to the reader what the body of the paper will look like before reading – like a very concise abstract.

A detailed thesis can also guide authors as they write papers, helping them to organize their claims and evidence logically. From the thesis statement above, we have sufficient information to craft an outline that might look like this:

I. Introduction – Thesis Statement
II. Causes of global warming
III. Consequences of global warming
IV. Solutions
V. Refutation of Counterarguments
VI. Conclusion

For more information on how to construct an outline, please see our Constructing an Outline guide on the ASC Student Toolkit.

Tips

• If you are given an assignment prompt, be sure that your thesis answers the questions in the prompt: no more, no less.
• If you are not given a prompt for an assignment, formulate the research question yourself, drawing from class notes and discussions; be sure to limit your thesis’s focus to one topic.
• Be sure that your thesis is something that another scholar could disagree with; otherwise, it is not a thesis, but a fact.