



Writing a Thesis

A Thesis:

- Is a brief, clear statement of the argument of your paper.
- Helps you plan your paper.
- Helps your reader see how you divide your main ideas into subtopics.

Typical Thesis Sentence Pattern

Topic + Attitude + Key Terms or General Phrases

Topic

- Is the general subject matter, such as writing for pleasure, ice skating, the setting in *The Great Gatsby*, or divorce.
- Is determining what to say about it.

Attitude

- Is what the paper is trying to *prove*.
- Is the position taken for or against a subject.
- Is an arguable position or opinion.

Main Points/Subtopics

- Are a few supporting ideas that will be discussed in more detail within the body of the paper.
- Are directly related to the topic and help to prove the writer's attitude.
- Are a map of the body of the paper with main points arranged in the same order to be addressed in the paper.

Thesis Statement Problems

Incomplete Thesis Statements

Ex.: Writing for pleasure is a good pastime.

Problem: There are no supporting reasons or subtopics. Your reader cannot yet see what direction your thesis will take, and has not been shown that there will be logical support and reasoning to your argument. To complete the thesis, briefly identify the main points that you are going to discuss to support your statement.

Improved Thesis: *Writing for pleasure is a good pastime because it helps release tension, allows for free expression, and sharpens communication skills.*

Topic: *Writing for pleasure*

Attitude: *is a good pastime*

Main points: - *helps release tension*
- *allows for free expression*
- *sharpens communication skills*

Incomplete Thesis Statement

Ex: I decided to become a writer when I was thirty-five years old.

Problem: No attitude is taken toward the subject; the sentence is a statement of facts rather than an argument of a position. Your reader is left with questions such as, "So what if you decided to be a writer? What are you going to say about it? In reality, it is not a true thesis because there is no point being proved. Also, there are no subpoints.

Improved Thesis: *At the age of thirty-five, when I decided to become a writer, the direction of my life changed forever; I had to leave my stable career, go back to college, and start over in an unfamiliar career field.*

Topic: *I decided to become a writer*

Attitude: *the direction of my life changed forever*

Main points: *-leave my stable career*

-go back to college

-start over in an unfamiliar career field

Overly-Broad Thesis Statements

Ex.: When beginning an essay, being familiar with several brainstorming techniques is helpful.

Problem: "Helpful" is a vague term that may leave your reader uncertain of exactly what you mean by it. Make it clear how or why, specifically, understanding this concept helps people.

Improved Thesis: *When beginning an essay, being familiar with several brainstorming techniques is helpful because it gives the writer more resources or ideas, thereby decreasing occurrences of writer's block, and allowing the writer to approach a topic from multiple perspectives, enabling a more full investigation of the topic's possibilities.*

Overly-Broad Thesis

Ex.: William Shakespeare was a very talented playwright.

Problem: This is a very general statement that includes a lot of information. There are many reasons why Shakespeare is considered a talented playwright, and to attempt to address them all in one paper is far too broad. Focus instead, perhaps, on proving one specific aspect of his skill, using examples from a few different plays. Another possibility would be to focus on 3 aspects of his skill as a playwright, seen in a particular play.

Improved Thesis: *William Shakespeare was a playwright skilled in intricate character development, as seen in the complexities of characters such as Hamlet, Macbeth, and Beatrice.*

Double-Checking: Some Questions to Ask Yourself

- Could your thesis also be argued against? Can you identify specifically what your thesis is trying to prove? This will show you whether or not you have taken a position or attitude in your thesis.
- Could your thesis be more clear and specific? Could you make it more effective by establishing a more narrow, specific focus? Ask yourself the basic questions, "who, what, when, where, why, and how" to help you examine your thesis more in depth.
- Does your thesis give a brief overview of the main supporting points of your paper, mapping out the progression of your ideas?