The Writing Center

Thesis Statements

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What Is A Thesis Statement?

- It narrows your subject to a single, central idea that you want readers to gain from your essay.
- It names the topic and asserts something specific and significant about it.
- It conveys your reason for writing, your purpose.
- It often provides a concise preview of how you will arrange your ideas in the essay.
Working Thesis

- Though you may not have a final thesis when you begin to write, you should establish a tentative working thesis early on in your writing process.
- The word working is important here because the working thesis may well change as you write. Even so, a working thesis focuses your thinking and research, and helps keep you on track.
- A working thesis should have two parts: a topic, which states the topic and a comment, which makes an important point about the topic.
How To Write A Working Thesis

• Use questions to focus a broad topic
  – Ask questions that will break the big topic into smaller topics
• Consider other angles to expand a narrow topic
  – Too-narrow topics are rarer than topics that are too broad.
  – If you cannot seem to find enough information on your topic to construct an argument, your topic might be too narrow.
At the drafting stage, try to develop your working thesis into an explicit statement, which might take the following form:

In this paper/essay/research project, I plan to explain/argue/analyze/ demonstrate and so on that _______ because/if___________. 
Common Problems To Avoid

- Don’t write a highly opinionated statement
  - Ex: With characteristic clumsiness, campus officials bumbled their way through the recent budget crisis.
- Don’t make an announcement
  - My essay will discuss whether a student pub should exist on campus.
- Don’t make a factual statement
  - Many businesses pollute the environment.
- Don’t make a broad statement
  - Nowadays, high school education is often meaningless.
Sample Thesis Statements

**Subject**
- Federal aid to college students

**Thesis statement**
- To compete well in the global economy, the United States must make higher education affordable for any student who qualifies academically.

**Subject**
- Preventing juvenile crime

**Thesis Statement**
- Juveniles can be diverted from crime by active learning programs, full-time sports, and intervention by mentors and role models.
Checklist for Revising Thesis Statements

- Does the statement make a concise assertion about your topic?
- Is the assertion limited to only one idea?
- Is the assertion specific and significant?
- Does the statement at least imply your purpose?
- Is the statement unified so that the parts relate to each other?
- Is the thesis statement one single sentence?
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