



Developing a Thesis Statement

For most academic essays a thesis statement is expected or required. As the key expression of the essay’s purpose—the writer’s intention—it is important to construct this statement effectively.

This handout explains a variety of thesis statement formats, and also gives you an opportunity to develop an appropriate one for the assignment on which you are working.



DIFFERENT TYPES OF THESIS STATEMENTS FOR DIFFERENT ASSIGNMENTS

In general, a thesis statement **expresses the purpose or main point of your essay**. Additionally, the thesis may include the significance of or your opinion on this topic. It is your commitment to the reader about the content, purpose, and organization of your paper.

Important points to consider:

- ❑ The thesis statement is usually
 - placed at the end of the introduction, (though some disciplines might require the thesis statement to be the first sentence of the essay) and
 - is often expressed in one sentence, though it may in some cases be two or (rarely) three sentences, depending on the length and complexity of the essay.
- ❑ You will need to determine whether your assignment is an *objective* or *subjective* writing assignment, in order to determine what type of thesis statement you require:
 - **Objective:** Requires the essay writer to present **unbiased information or a critical review** of a topic through an organized presentation of evidence, examples, and analysis.

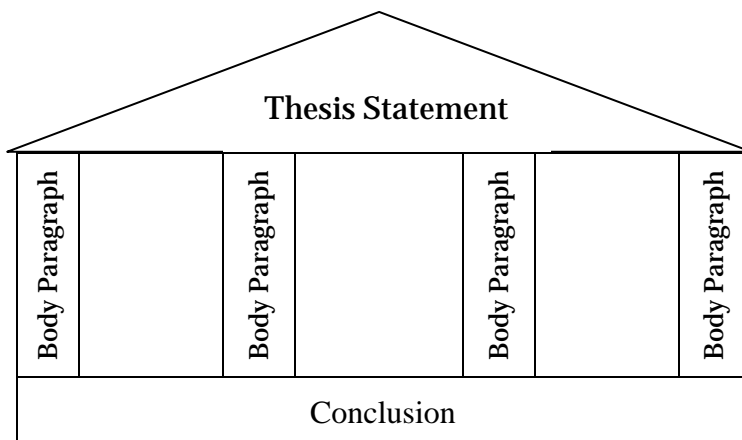


What words in your assignment show it requires an **objective** thesis? Define “**critical review**”:

- **Subjective:** Requires the essay writer to make a **claim or assertion about a topic**, which is supported through an organized presentation of evidence, examples, and analysis.



What words in your assignment show it requires an **subjective** thesis? Define “**assertion**”:



Like a roof, a **thesis statement** establishes the overarching claim or purpose of the paper that will be supported by the body paragraphs.



Each **body paragraph** clearly states its connection to the thesis, providing distinct and cohesive support to the whole argument.




The **conclusion** is the foundation for your argument or story: it restates the thesis, grounding it and adding the significance of what you have said as it relates to larger issues.

More points to consider:

- ❑ A thesis statement for an academic essay is more than a statement of fact; it is an **arguable claim** or the **writer’s position** on the topic, which is usually a direct response the question posed by the assignment.
- ❑ **The following statements are NOT effective thesis statements. Compare them to the ones in the table.**
 - *There are many forms of American jazz.* (Expository: General fact, not claim.)
 - *The museum has a new exhibit.* (Narrative: General fact, lacks dominant impression or lesson of narrative.)
 - *Alcoholism has many causes.* (Research: Fact, too broad, not a claim.)
 - *I agree with the author’s opinion.* (Response: Too general, lacks essay writer’s claim.)

| Type of assignment | Qualities of thesis statement | Examples |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <i>Expository or analytical essay</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ presents the main point or topic ▪ for subjective essays, includes an assertion or argument ▪ may include key supporting points | <p>Objective: <i>These three most popular forms of American jazz have both shared and distinctive elements that comprise standard compositions.</i></p> <p>Subjective: <i>Since jazz is an original American art form, its unique musical elements are most accurately described in terms of its historical-sociological development.</i></p> |
| <i>Personal essay</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ presents the main point or topic ▪ for subjective essays, includes the essay writer’s dominant impression or opinion, or the significance of the topic ▪ may include key supporting points | <p>Objective: <i>The local museum of art has arranged its collection of photographic pieces in both thematic and chronological order.</i></p> <p>Subjective: <i>Although we anticipated our class trip to the museum to be less than exciting, it was filled with unexpected challenges, surprising exasperations, and unfortunate personal tensions.</i></p> |
| <i>Reaction or response</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ presents a critique of, or (dis)agreement with, a text | <p><i>Even after reading Solomon’s article several times, it was his lack of authoritative evidence, as well as his own weak assertions, that failed to persuade me to agree to institute the draft.</i></p> |
| <i>Research paper</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>objective:</i> gives a brief and balanced view that is the summary of the essay writer’s research ▪ <i>subjective:</i> in general terms, states the main conclusions of the writer, which resulted from his/her analysis of the research | <p>Objective: <i>Research into the causes of alcoholism emphasizes both sides of the nature and nurture debate, which addresses the genetic factors as well as personal experiences that may lead to addictive personality.</i></p> <p>Subjective: <i>Although some researchers have concluded that genetic factors are primarily to blame for the disease of alcoholism, there is much stronger evidence to the contrary that proves that environmental factors are more likely the cause.</i></p> |
| <i>Other?</i> | | |

 Always check your assignment sheet and ask your instructor to clarify these requirements. You can find more examples on the Student Hub Matrix, linked to the Writing Center Website:

<http://www.sbccc.edu/learningresources/website/documents/Matrix/WritingPapers.htm>.


 **WRITING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT**

Re-read the assignment and make notes on it as you would a course text:

- Underline the VERBS (e.g., *define, review, summarize*) to determine what the assignment is asking you to do..
- Underline the NOUNS (e.g., *journal entry, narrative essay, critique*) to see what form the writing is to take.
- As you narrow your topic, use the table below to develop a more specific thesis statement.

OPTION 1: The Thesis-First Process

- Be sure your thesis is a direct response to the assignment or writing prompt.
- Review the example topics and thesis statements. Then apply these ideas to your current assignment by filling in the last column.

 **Brainstorm question:** *What do you wonder about your topic? What intrigues or interests you about it?*

| <i>Moving from general to specific</i> | <i>Examples</i> | <i>Current assignment</i> |
|---|--|---------------------------|
| Topic: The general area of interest or subject of the assignment. | <i>Justice in America</i> | |
| Focused Topic: A subject that has been limited, so as not to be too broad or unwieldy. | <i>The death penalty</i> | |
| General Thesis: The main assertion you wish to make about the topic. (<i>subjective</i>) | <i>The death penalty should be abolished.</i> | |
| Specific Thesis: A general thesis plus supporting points, which may also indicate the organizational pattern of the essay. | <i>The death penalty should be abolished because it is fundamentally immoral, ineffective in preventing crime, and sometimes mistakenly enforced on innocent people.</i> | |

For longer papers (6 – 10 pages), you may need to expand your thesis statement into more than one sentence, moving from a general claim to your specific reasons for it:


| | | |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Sophisticated Thesis: A statement or assertion that expresses a complex idea (or ideas) in a subtle, nuanced way.</p> | <p>Simple thesis: <i>The Battle of Gettysburg was the turning point of the Civil War because afterwards the South never regained the offensive.</i></p> | <p>A sophisticated version of this thesis might be: <i>Although the Battle of Gettysburg has long been considered the turning point of the Civil War, research shows that this assessment is not entirely correct. Specifically, without the outcomes of other critical battles, and without specific political developments, this battle would have been seen only as a rare Union victory in a protracted war.</i></p> |
|---|--|---|

OPTION 2: The Thesis-Last Process


Sometimes it is easier to write (or significantly revise) the thesis statement after the body of the paper has been completely or partially written. As you work through the writing and revising process to the final draft, make adjustments so the ideas in the thesis statement and body match.

Using your essay draft or outline, complete the following table:

- Read each **body paragraph or outline section** and write down the main idea that is actually expressed, not what you thought you wrote.
- Read the **topic sentence** for the paragraph to see if it matches or needs revision.
- Re-read your main ideas** in the table. Revise your topic sentences and/or thesis as necessary.

 **Thesis statement before glossing:** *What do you think you want to say in this paper?*

| | <i>Main idea expressed:</i> | <i>Matches topic sentence? Connected to thesis? What changes need to be made?</i> |
|----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Body #1 | | |
| Body #2 | | |
| Body #3 | | |
| Body #4 | | |
| Body #5 | | |

 **Revised thesis statement:** *What are you really saying in this paper?*

- See also the WCenter Handout “**Glossing Your Paragraphs to Develop Your Thesis**” for more tips on revising your paper to make it a cohesive and clear explanation of your ideas.