

Thesis Statements

SUU Writing Center

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What is a thesis statement?

A thesis is **an assertion meant to initiate and invite argument**. In other words, it is a statement of your perspective on a given issue, a statement that often includes an assertion of your point of view and a short listing of the reasons you believe as you do. If you include a listing of reasons in your thesis, be sure to discuss, explain, and support each of those reasons in the order in which they are first mentioned as the paper progresses.

A THESIS STATEMENT IS NOT SIMPLY A STATEMENT OF FACT NOR IS IT A STATEMENT OF UNSUPPORTED OPINION.

Keep in mind that your paper will only be as significant and, therefore, as valuable as your thesis. Even if your thesis statement is clear, if it simply states the obvious, it will not strike the reader as worthwhile.

Where does it appear?

Although it is true that sometimes a writer implies a thesis rather than stating it directly, in most undergraduate college papers, the thesis appears either in the first line of the paper or directly after the introduction. Additionally, it is often restated (although not usually repeated word for word) in the conclusion of the essay. Sometimes a writer presents a thesis in the form of a question, especially when his or her point is likely to face strong opposition from the paper's intended audience.

What are some examples of thesis statements?

EXAMPLE of a THESIS STATEMENT appearing in the **FIRST LINES** of an essay:
(This thesis statement is adapted from a speech to the National Organization of Women by Elizabeth George.)

- Despite its reputation, polygamy is the one lifestyle that offers an independent woman a real chance to “have it all” because such a marriage offers women more choices of potential partners, gives them an empowering network of friendships with sister wives, and creates a humane system of childcare that benefits mothers and offspring alike.

EXAMPLE of a THESIS STATEMENT FOLLOWING AN INTRODUCTION:

(This introduction and thesis was written by SUU student John D. Bunkall as part of a researched argument for ENGL 2010):

- **INTRODUCTION:** According to a recent report, in 2000, Jon Corzine, a multimillionaire from New Jersey, spent more than \$60 million of his own fortune to win a seat in the United States Senate, while the average candidate spent \$4.5 million. Despite current laws limiting the amount of money an individual can contribute to a campaign to \$1,000, sixty-nine contributors gave \$100,000 or more to the Republican

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National Committee to be used for campaigns, while seventy-two contributors gave \$100,000 or more to the Democratic National Committee (Cox par. 43). The same report indicates that a 1992 Gordon S. Black poll found that 75 percent of the registered likely voters agreed that “Congress is largely owned by special interest groups,” while 85 percent agreed that “special interest money buys the loyalty of candidates” (par. 17). Such statistics suggest that laws in the current campaign finance system have allowed money and power to take control of the U.S. federal elections. Over half of the United States population are concerned about this system and feel that Congress should pass some sort of campaign reform legislation (par. 45). Even United States congressional representatives recognize the need for reform. Senator Robert Bennett from Utah has stated, “I am an advocate of both campaign finance reform and the constitution...Clearly, the current system for financing political campaigns is imperfect and could be improved by reasonable reform” (1).

- **THESIS:** *Because citizens and legislators recognize the need for reform, the United States Congress should pass a law to change the current system of financing campaigns.* Existing laws create an unequal playing field in favor of wealthy and powerful candidates and place greater importance on special interest groups, leading the populace to be more cynical toward government. Reform would allow the best candidate to win the election and return the candidate’s focus to their constituents. New reforms should include banning soft money, limiting all personal campaign expenditures, and increasing the amount of individual donations from \$1,000 to \$5,000.

A GOOD thesis statement is:

<p>ARGUMENTATIVE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should take some sort of stand on the issue; in other words, it should make a point with which reasonable people could disagree. A thesis statement should not simply state a fact. • It is based on evidence and an understanding of other reasonable viewpoints. 	<p>A TIP ON WORDING:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notice that both thesis statements above are pushing a point that is debatable. Bunkall’s thesis uses a common approach by employing a “should/because” assertion. • Be wary of asserting a thesis that is based on opinion alone. Opinions are of little value in academic writing unless they can be supported.
<p>FOCUSED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid thesis statements that “bite off more than they can chew.” In other words, don’t try to argue more than you can research and prove, given the time and space you have available. 	<p>A TIP ON SPECIFYING: In the second edition of the text <i>Ancient Rhetorics for Contemporary Students</i>, Sharon Crowley suggest that arguments can be based on either GENERAL or SPECIFIC issues.</p> <p>TURN THE PAGE FOR MORE</p>

<p>Notice that the first GENERAL question would require a lot of research on abstract theoretical concerns and a thesis that takes a philosophical stand. In contrast, the MORE SPECIFIC statements, by narrowing the focus, give the writer a way to approach the situation more concretely.</p>	<p>Crowley points out general issues usually “require broader knowledge” and more complicated arguments. Here are the questions that Crowley uses to show the difference between general and more specific approaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GENERAL: “Is conversation of the environment more important than economic development?” • SPECIFIC: Should the United States sacrifice industries that negatively impact the environment—logging, manufacture of certain chemicals and plastics, nuclear power plants—in order to conserve the environment? • EVEN MORE SPECIFIC: Should the City Council of Mytown reject an application to build a large new discount department store if this requires clear-cutting five acres of forest? • VERY SPECIFIC: Should I take time to recycle plastics, paper, and aluminum even though to do so is a hassle and costs money? (Crowley 34).
<p>SETS an ORGANIZATIONAL AGENDA for the paper</p>	<p>Notice that Bunkall’s argument sums up the reasons he advocates campaign finance reform IN THE ORDER that he is going to discuss those reasons. When you create such a list in your thesis, be sure to cover ALL of the reasons you’ve summarized in the SAME ORDER as your listing.</p>