

Thesis Statements

Criteria for a Good Thesis

- A thesis statement should be argumentative (debatable) and function as a one-two sentence --condensation of your paper's primary claim (or argument).
- Thesis statements are necessary so that readers can identify the point and/or argument of your paper early in the paper.
- A thesis statement also allows you to state the primary reasons behind your paper's argument early in the paper.
- A thesis statement is not a "duh" statement, such as "The extermination of the Jews was bad." --A good thesis statement makes an argument that has not been over-discussed.
- A thesis statement should include specific and pointed language as opposed to unclear or unsure wording. Avoid words such as "kind of," "arguably," "somewhat," etc.

**In general, your thesis statement will accomplish the aforementioned goals if you think of the thesis as the answer to the question(s) your paper explores.

Examples of Good and Bad Thesis Statements:

- Good: Hunger persists in Appalachia because jobs are scarce, and farming in the infertile soil of the region is rarely profitable.
**This is a strong thesis statement because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic and identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.
- Bad: Hunger persists in Appalachia.
**This is a poor thesis statement because it does not provide any reasons behind WHY "hunger persists in Appalachia." In addition, this thesis statement gives the reader only a vague idea of what the paper is going to argue.
- Good: The concept of global warming should not receive the amount of attention that is currently focused on this issue because the earth constantly goes through spells of warming and cooling; the increasing temperature of the earth is but a part of this natural cycle and out of human control.
**This is a good thesis statement because it clearly states the writer's argument WITHOUT jumping right into statistics, etc., that should be revealed in the body of the paper.
- Bad: The concept of global warming should not receive the amount of attention that is currently focused on this issue.
**This is a poor thesis statement because it is solely based on opinion. A thesis statement needs to be backed up by factual reasoning.



Exercises:

What is wrong with the following thesis statements? Revise them to make them more effective:

- Racism is bad because people should not hate one another.
- The Bible says that the Lord is coming back, so it must be true.
- The Bureau of Land Management needs to institute a better policy when it comes to the wild horses out West.
- Living in an apartment has many advantages.

What do you think about the following thesis statements? Revise and improve them if necessary.

- “Many Americans have been raised on a steady diet of Westerns starring John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, or Kevin Costner. Despite their tremendous power, we instinctively know that our real experiences often clash with the myth that Hollywood promotes. There is a gap between the myth of the west portrayed in Westerns and the West one encounters in reality.” (adapted from *The Great Plains*, page 299)
- “For wildlife biologists and managers, there are concerns that the animal rights movement will eventually eliminate, curtail, or drastically change forms of wildlife recreation (hunting and trapping) and wildlife research practices and opportunities.” (from “Why Do We Debate Animal Rights?” by Robert H. Schmidt—*Wildl. Soc. Bull.* 18: 459-61, 1990)
- “In taking a bird's eye view of labor legislation since the beginning of the nineteenth century we see that for nearly a hundred years legislators confined themselves chiefly to the regulation of the age and sex of workers, hours of labor, hygiene of factories, and all the other environmental conditions of labor, but made practically no effort to regulate the value of labor, the center and heart of the labor contract.” (from “Some Phases of the Minimum Wage Question” by James E. Le Rossignol-- *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Supplement, Papers and Proceedings of the Twenty-ninth Annual Meeting of the American Economic Association. Mar., 1917, pp. 251-274.

Additional Resources:

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/composition/thesis.htm>

Diana Hacker's "A Writer's Reference" (Fifth Edition). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Joseph Gibaldi's "MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers" (Sixth Edition). The Modern Language Association of America.