



Thesis Statements

Thesis statements establish for your readers both the relationship between the ideas and the order in which the material will be presented. As the writer, you can use the thesis statement as a guide in developing a coherent argument. Remember, in the thesis statement you are not simply describing or recapitulating the material; you are taking a specific position that you need to defend. In other words, a well-written thesis is a tool for both writer and reader, acting as a "road sign" that lets the reader know what to expect and reminding the writer of the direction of the text.

Narrowing the Topic

Once you have the general topic, the following questions will help you narrow to a thesis statement:

- How do I state the assigned topic clearly and succinctly?
- What are the most interesting and relevant aspects of the topic?
- In what order do I want to present the various aspects, and how do my ideas relate to each other?
- What is my point of view regarding the topic?

Writing a Thesis Statement

Using the topic information, develop this formulaic sentence:

I am writing about _____, and I am going to argue, show, or prove _____.

What you wrote in the first blank is the topic of your paper; what you wrote in the second blank is what focuses your paper (suggested by Patrick Hartwell in *Open to Language*). For example, a sentence might be:

I am going to write about senior citizens who volunteer at literacy projects, and I am going to show that they are physically and mentally invigorated by the responsibility of volunteering.

Next, refine the sentence so that it is consistent with your style. For example:

Senior citizens who volunteer at literacy projects are invigorated physically and mentally by the responsibility of volunteering.

This revision becomes a thesis statement for your project. For a comparison/contrast paper, however, you need to go one step further to indicate the structure of your argument:

Compared to senior citizens who do not participate in any volunteering activity, those who volunteer at literacy projects are invigorated physically and mentally by the responsibility of volunteering.



Here is a second example illustrating the formulation of another thesis statement. First, read this sentence that includes both topic and focusing comment:

I am going to write about how Plato and Sophocles understand the proper role of women in Greek society, and I am going to argue that though they remain close to traditional ideas about women, the authors also introduce some revolutionary views which increase women's place in society.

Now read the refined sentence, consistent with your style:

When examining the role of women in society, Plato and Sophocles remain close to traditional ideas about women's duties and capabilities in society; however, the authors also introduce some revolutionary views which increase women's place in society.

For a comparison-contrast paper:

When examining the role of women in society, Plato and Sophocles remain close to traditional ideas about women's duties and capabilities in society; however, the authors also introduce some revolutionary views which increase women's place in society. While Plato argues his position philosophically, Sophocles moves beyond speculation to demonstrate in the character of Antigone a woman's ability to take action.

As you write, refer back to your working thesis often to make sure you are following the route you established at the beginning. But remember, thesis statements can always be rewritten while revising; just be sure that the body of the paper reflects your thesis in both content and organization.