

The Thesis Statement

The Thesis Statement: is normally one (in some cases two or three) sentences near the start of the paper that tells the reader what the writing is about. It can help the writer to make ideas more concise and develop arguments, while providing a guide to the reader.

Six Steps for Developing an Effective Thesis Statement: The best thesis statements build on successive complications by running up against and responding to conflicting evidence. A six-step process can be used in formulating a thesis statement.

1. Many writers begin with a Working Thesis (WT). It is based on the interpretation of the evidence that is sufficient to get the writer started.
2. The WT is then used to explain as much of the evidence or findings as reasonably possible. There is often an inclination only to see the evidence that fits the WT.
3. Therefore, an active search for evidence that cannot be adequately explained by the WT needs to take place at this stage.
4. It is important to openly show where the WT and the evidence contradict each other. After this, an explanation for the contradictions becomes necessary.
5. In order to accommodate the evidence that does not fit, the WT will have to be reworded to explain the contradictions.
6. Steps two, three, four, and five must be repeated until the writer is satisfied that the thesis statement accounts for the evidence as fully and accurately as possible.

Checklist for a Good Thesis Statement: The following guidelines can help determine if the above six steps have been followed successfully.

1. A good thesis statement offers a theory about the evidence that should not be immediately obvious to the reader.
2. Good thesis statements are almost always made, and not found!
3. It should be possible to make a reasonable argument against the thesis statement.
4. Most effective thesis statements contain tension and are conceptually complex with words like "although" and "however."
5. The body of the paper not only provides evidence to support the thesis statement, but also shows the steps in the evolution of the thesis as new evidence is found.
6. Contradictory evidence should be used to rework and refine the thesis to make it as accurate as possible.
7. The writer should check the various versions of the thesis throughout the draft and confirm that it does more than demonstrate the general validity of a claim.

Weak Thesis Statements: Five of the most common mistakes are thesis statements that: 1) make no claim or argument; 2) are obviously true; 3) restate conventional wisdom; 4) offer personal conviction with little evidence; 5) make overly broad claims.