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**A thesis statement:**

* tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
* is a road map for the paper; in other words, it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
* directly answers the question asked of you.
  + **Q:** “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?”
  + **A:** “The potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class are . . .”
* ***OR***
  + **A:** “Using computers in a fourth-grade class promises to improve . . .”
* A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself. The subject, or topic, of an essay might be World War II or Moby Dick; a thesis must then offer a way to understand the war or the novel.
* makes a claim that others might dispute.
* is usually a single sentence near the beginning of your paper (most often, at the end of the first paragraph) that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

**How do I create a thesis?**

A thesis is the result of a lengthy thinking process. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading an essay assignment. Before you develop an explanation of any topic, you have to collect and organize evidence, look for possible relationships between known facts (such as surprising contrasts or similarities), and think about the significance of these relationships. Once you do this thinking, you will probably have a “working thesis” that presents a basic or main idea that you think you can support with evidence.

Writers use all kinds of techniques to stimulate their thinking and to help them clarify relationships or comprehend the broader significance of a topic and arrive at a thesis statement.

**Examples**

Let’s look at an example. Suppose your literature professor hands out the following assignment in a class on the American novel: Write an analysis of some aspect of Mark Twain’s novel *Huckleberry Finn*. “This will be easy,” you think. “I loved *Huckleberry Finn*!” You grab a pad of paper and write:

*Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel.*

Why is this thesis weak? Think about what the reader would expect from the essay that follows: most likely a general, appreciative summary of Twain’s novel. But the question did not ask you to summarize; it asked you to analyze. Your professor is probably not interested in your opinion of the novel; instead, she wants you to think about *why* it’s such a great novel—what do Huck’s adventures tell us about life, about America, about coming of age, about race, etc.? First, the question asks you to pick an aspect of the novel that you think is important to its structure or meaning—for example, the role of storytelling, the contrasting scenes between the shore and the river, or the relationships between adults and children.

Now you write:

*In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.*

Here’s a working thesis with potential: you have highlighted an important aspect of the novel for investigation. However, it’s still not clear what your analysis will reveal. Your reader is intrigued but is still thinking, “So what? What’s the point of this contrast? What does it signify?” Perhaps you are not sure yet, either. That’s fine—begin to work on comparing scenes from the book and see what you discover. Free write, make lists, jot down Huck’s actions and reactions. Eventually you will be able to clarify for yourself, and then for the reader, why this contrast matters. After examining the evidence and considering your own insights, you write:

*Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain’s Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave “civilized” society and go back to nature.*

This final thesis statement presents an interpretation of a literary work based on an analysis of its content. Of course, for the essay itself to be successful, you must now present evidence from the novel that will convince the reader of your interpretation.



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<http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml>

**How to Tell a Strong Thesis Statement from a Weak One**

**1. A strong thesis statement takes some sort of stand.**

Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject. For example, if you are writing a paper for a class on fitness, you might be asked to choose a popular weight-loss product to evaluate. Here are two thesis statements:

**There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.**

This is a weak thesis statement. First, it fails to take a stand. Second, the phrase *negative and positive aspects* is vague.

**Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.**

This is a strong thesis because it takes a stand, and because it's specific.

**2. A strong thesis statement justifies discussion.**

Your thesis should indicate the point of the discussion. If your assignment is to write a paper on kinship systems, using your own family as an example, you might come up with either of these two thesis statements:

**My family is an extended family.**

This is a weak thesis because it merely states an observation. Your reader won’t be able to tell the point of the statement, and will probably stop reading.

**While most American families would view consanguineal marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.**

This is a strong thesis because it shows how your experience contradicts a widely-accepted view. A good strategy for creating a strong thesis is to show that the topic is controversial. Readers will be interested in reading the rest of the essay to see how you support your point.

**3. A strong thesis statement expresses one main idea.**

Readers need to be able to see that your paper has one main point. If your thesis statement expresses more than one idea, then you might confuse your readers about the subject of your paper. For example:

**Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.**

This is a weak thesis statement because the reader can’t decide whether the paper is about marketing on the Internet or Web pages. To revise the thesis, the relationship between the two ideas needs to become more clear. One way to revise the thesis would be to write:

**Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.**

This is a strong thesis because it shows that the two ideas are related. Hint: a great many clear and engaging thesis statements contain words like *because*, *since*, *so*, *although*, *unless*, and *however*.

**4. A strong thesis statement is specific.**

A thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help you keep your paper to a manageable topic. For example, if you're writing a seven-to-ten page paper on hunger, you might say:

**World hunger has many causes and effects.**

This is a weak thesis statement for two major reasons. First, *world hunger* can’t be discussed thoroughly in seven to ten pages. Second, *many causes and effects* is vague. You should be able to identify specific causes and effects. A revised thesis might look like this:

**Hunger persists in Glandelinia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.**

This is a strong thesis statement because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic, and it also identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.

*Produced by Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN*