

# Developing a Thesis



A **thesis statement** is a complete sentence that articulates the purpose and argument of your paper. Strong thesis statements are specific and limited in scope. They not only give direction to your readers, but also guide your writing process by providing a focus for your research, outlining, and drafting. The thesis statement usually appears in the first or second paragraph of the essay so that readers can follow the argument from the beginning. Often, writers state the thesis in last sentence of the first paragraph.

## Characteristics of a Well Developed Thesis

### **It is a statement of an argument rather than a promise or a topic.**

A good thesis provides the author with a statement that they can defend or argue throughout the body of their paper. Although it does identify the topic that will be written, it also provides a clear stance within a larger argument.

- TOPIC:** High football salaries.
- PROMISE:** In this paper I am going to show that pro football salaries are not too high.
- THESIS:** Pro football players' high salaries are justified because they put money into the economy by supporting many people and businesses.

### **It is specific and extends beyond the immediately apparent.**

A well developed thesis is as specific as possible while still providing sufficient subject matter to work with. It should draw upon your body of evidence and move beyond immediately apparent observations in order to state your own original position on a topic. A specific thesis gives you a precise notion of what we're going to say about a much broader subject. You may refine your thesis by asking such questions as "Why does this seem to be true?" and "What are the effects of this observation?"

- TOO BROAD:** Young people are too influenced by the media.
- BETTER:** The frequent use of unusually thin models in television and magazine advertisements has contributed to the rise of eating disorders among adolescent girls and boys in the United States.

### **It is limited in scope so that it can be adequately proven within the bounds of your paper.**

A thesis statement is limited so it can give direction to the paper. The thesis statement sets limits on the scope of what you will cover in the paper, so it reflects the contents accurately.

- UNLIMITED:** Many new drugs are improving cancer treatments.
- LIMITED:** Increased access to chemotherapy drugs has extended the lives of low-income breast cancer patients in Boston.
- UNLIMITED:** Bourgeois society is frivolous.
- LIMITED:** In JD Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's descriptions of his encounters with the wealthy depict the bourgeois society as frivolous.

## Creating a Thesis Statement

- Figure out your stance on an issue. You might do this by articulating questions you have about the topic. Your thesis may arise through the process of answering these questions.
- How do you feel about a particular topic? How might you turn your gut reactions or initial opinions into an **evidenced argument**?
- Mark the passages in your research, freewriting or notes that pertain to your topic. What patterns do you see? What questions are raised that you might answer in your thesis?
- Once you have a basic stance, think about expanding and refining it. Why is this so? In what cases? What are some examples?

## Writing with a Thesis Statement

- Mark the passages in your research, freewriting, notes, or rough draft that support your position.
- Create an outline for your essay using your thesis statement as a guide.
- No matter what thesis statement you develop, you will need enough relevant information (research, lab reports, textual evidence, etc.) to support it credibly and clearly. As you write and revise, check your thesis statement often to see if you have drifted away from it. It is important that each paragraph relate closely to the thesis statement.

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### **This handout was adapted from the following resources:**

- Crews, Frederick, Sandra Schor, and Michael Hennessy, eds. *The Borzoi Handbook for Writers*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993.
- Fulwiler, Toby and Alan R. Hayakawa. *The Blair Handbook: Instructor Copy*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2007.
- Glenn, Cheryl, Robert Keith Miller, Suzanne Strobeck Webb, and Loretta Gray, eds. *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. United States: Thomson Heinle, 2004.
- Hendengren, Beth Finch. *A TA's Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004.
- Roth, Audrey J. *The Research Paper: Process, Form, and Content*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. Albany, NY: Wadsworth, 1995.