

## Make a Thesis Statement Work for You

Most formal writing assignments require some sort of thesis statement—a *strong claim that you put forward and then prove or argue in the essay*.

The topic or theme is your subject, but the thesis defines your position on that subject. Once you have a topic, you can formulate a thesis using experiences, readings, lectures, and research. You may develop a thesis by asking questions to focus on one issue or problem the topic raises. A thesis statement is the answer to that question.

### A strong thesis:

- Makes a *definite and limited claim* that needs to be explained by further discussion
  - A good thesis claim is specific and focused.
  - It takes a position that others might challenge.
  - It shows an awareness of difficulties or disagreements.
  - It avoids being too broad or trite.
- Gives an indication of the *method* you will use to prove the claim
  - A good thesis shows that this argument is worth attention.
  - The method will be appropriate to the type of evidence you will use.
  - It avoids being emotional or vague.
- Outlines the *evidence* you will use to support the argument
  - A good thesis is suitably complex for the type and length of essay.
  - The type of evidence will depend on the requirements of the essay.
  - It avoids being too sweeping in scope.

Formulating a thesis at the beginning of your work can help you focus your thinking and research. Your thesis might change as you incorporate new knowledge and think further. You might need to do a “Reverse Outline” to make sure your thesis reflects the paper you have written. (See [writing.iliff.edu](http://writing.iliff.edu)>Iliff Generated Handouts for more on making a Reverse Outline.)

### Some Rumors (and Ideas about Them):

A thesis *does not* necessarily need to be one sentence in length, but it should make a limited point.

Most thesis statements come at the end of the first paragraph, but this is *not* a requirement. Although every paper *may not* require a thesis, most writing will benefit from a thesis statement that helps you clarify what you are saying for yourself and your reader.

**The thesis statement is the promise you make your reader.  
Make sure your essay keeps the promise your thesis makes.**

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Go to [writing.iliff.edu](http://writing.iliff.edu) for more or contact us at [writing@iliff.edu](mailto:writing@iliff.edu)

