

One Pager on Writing a Good Thesis

The thesis statement is typically located at the end of your opening paragraph. (The opening paragraph serves to set the context for the thesis.) Remember, if your reader is looking for a thesis, make it clear, strong, and easy to find.

Determine what kind of paper you are writing:

- An **analytical** paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts, evaluates the issue or idea, and presents this breakdown and evaluation to the audience.
- An **expository** (explanatory) paper explains something to the audience.
- An **argumentative** paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with specific evidence.
- If you are writing a text which does not fall under these three categories (ex. a narrative), a thesis statement somewhere in the first paragraph could still be **helpful** to your reader.

Attributes of a good thesis:

- It should be contestable, proposing an arguable point with which people could reasonably disagree. A strong thesis is provocative; it takes a stand and justifies the discussion you will present.
- It tackles a subject that could be adequately covered in the format of the paper assigned.
- It clearly asserts your own conclusion based on evidence. Note: Be flexible. The evidence may lead you to a conclusion you didn't think you'd reach.
- It provides the reader with a map which acts as a guide through your essay.
- It anticipates and refutes the counter-arguments.
- It **avoids** vague language ("like" "it seems").
- It **avoids** the first person. ("I believe," "In my opinion").
- It should pass the "Who cares?" test.

Take the quick Five Question Thesis test:

1. Does the thesis inspire a reasonable reader to ask, "How?" or "Why?"
2. Would the reader **NOT** respond with, "Who cares?"
3. Does the thesis avoid general phrasing and/or sweeping words such as "all" or "none" or "every"?
4. Does the thesis lead the reader toward the topic sentences (the subtopics needed to prove the thesis)?
5. Can the thesis be adequately developed in the required length of the paper?

If you cannot answer "YES" to all of these questions, what changes must you make in order for your thesis to pass the Five Question Thesis test?