

Introduction to Thesis Statements

THESIS: As you explore your subject, you will begin to see possible ways to connect your ideas. A sentence or two that links all your main ideas and explains your opinion on those ideas is called a *thesis statement*. Generally, you will want to put your thesis statement in the opening paragraph of your essay.

OPINION: A thesis should contain a topic (*what* you are writing about), an opinion (what your *attitude* is towards the topic), and the reasons why you hold that view (explanations answering “*why?*” or “*so what?*”). In other words, a thesis statement needs to be an arguable assertion that can be proven with facts and opinions. To check to see if a thesis is arguable, locate the *opinion words*.

LOCATING THE OPINION IN A THESIS: When you look for the opinion in a thesis, ask yourself what the writer’s attitude is towards the topic. For example, in the sentence, “Hiking in the mountains of Yosemite this summer was an exciting experience,” the topic is “hiking” and the controlling idea is that this trip was “exciting.” Another person on the same trip might have had a different attitude and may have found the trip boring or exhausting. “Exciting” reveals the writer’s attitude and also indicates what the essay with this thesis statement will be focused on: demonstrating *why* the trip was “exciting.” This thesis statement limits the writer’s focus and clearly tells the reader what the essay will be about.



EXERCISE: Finding Opinion Words

Circle the opinion words below; if there are no opinion words, it is not a thesis.

1. Much maligned and the subject of unwarranted fears, most bats are harmless and highly beneficial.
2. Vigorous exercise is a good way to reduce the effects of stress on the body.
3. Duluth and Green Bay differ in four major ways.
4. Developing color film is more complicated than developing black-and-white film.
5. In this essay, I will discuss gay marriages.
6. Television is destroying the unity of the modern family.
7. In her essay, Erlich shows that there is a balance of community and isolation in her hometown.

AN EFFECTIVE THESIS: An effective thesis should be a generalization, not a fact; it should be limited, not too broad; and it should be sharply focused, not too vague.

Too Factual: The first polygraph was developed by John A. Larson in 1921.

Revised: Because the polygraph has not proved reliable, even under controlled conditions, its use by private employers should be banned.

Too Broad: Many drugs are now being used successfully to treat mental illnesses.

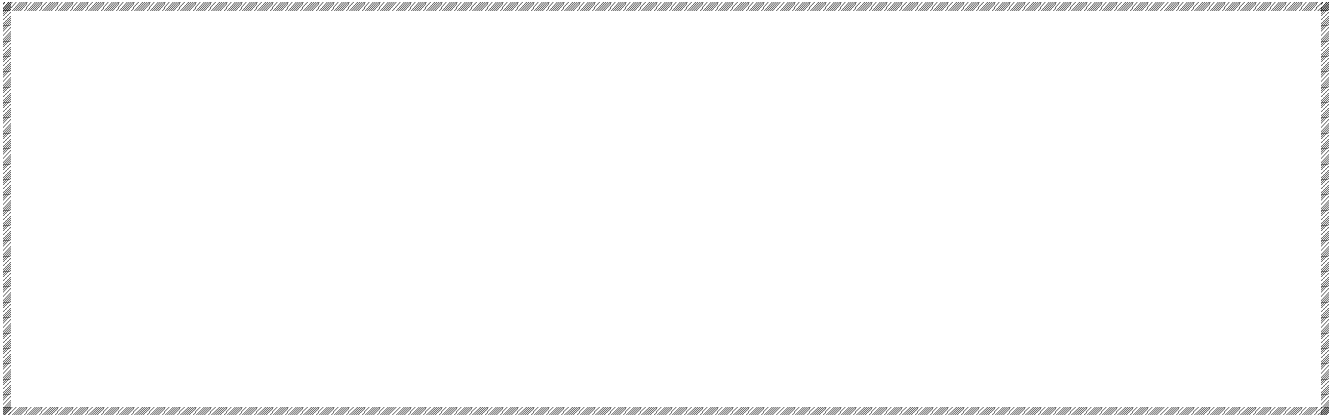
Revised: Despite its risks and side effects, lithium is an effective treatment for depression.

Too Vague: Many of the songs played on station WKAB are disgusting.

Revised: Of the songs played on station WKAB, all too many depict sex crudely, sanction the beating or rape of women, or foster gang violence.

Creating Your Own Thesis Statement on a Topic

Brainstorm various issues and ideas connected with your topic:



Create a thesis:

Remember, every thesis and topic sentence must contain not only a topic, but also *opinion words* which tell us the attitude of the writer toward the topic and assure that you have an arguable thesis. There are several methods of creating thesis statements:

ANSWER THE QUESTION DIRECTLY. One way to create a thesis statement is to directly answer the assigned question or if the writing assignment is not in the form of a question, then by responding to the task.

Example: *Gary Larson's "The Artist's Block" cartoon made me laugh because of his comic depiction of human beings.*

CONNECT YOUR IDEAS UNDER ONE JOINING SENTENCE. If you generated a cluster or a list, examine your main supporting points and create a sentence that joins them.

Example: *Gary Larson's "The Artist's Block" is amusing because it makes fun of the high-minded world of art and also the low-minded world we can all related to of getting stuck over something stupid.*

Be sure that your thesis is not too factual, not too broad, and not too vague.

Practice in creating a thesis:

1. Create questions using words from the brainstorm. Use the "journalist's questions": WHO, WHAT, WHERE, HOW, WHEN, WHY?
2. Answer your best questions. Seek opinions that need to be proven, not unarguable facts.
3. Deepen several of your answers to #2: take them a step further by asking "so what?!" Why should we be concerned? How is this important? What can be learned from this?