

Writing Center

Thesis Statements

THESIS STATEMENT AND THE REASON INSTRUCTORS INSIST EVERY ESSAY WRITTEN HAS ONE.

A **thesis** states the main idea of a paper. It tells the reader precisely what your essay is about. It says, “Okay, pay attention now. Here is where I tell you what’s going to happen in this paper.” Instructors like this. The thesis statement, which is usually in the essay’s introduction, carries a big load. Write it with a firm, authoritative voice. A thesis statement must perform four tasks:

1. Identify the subject.
2. State a claim, an approach, or an attitude.
3. Suggest the direction of the writing.
4. Set the tone (informative, persuasive, entertaining, or a combination).

In this sample thesis statement, taken from *Reading and Writing Well* (p. 35), all four tasks are accomplished.

Thesis: For the dedicated player, the challenge, the enjoyment, and the camaraderie make softball a game worth playing.

Notice how the thesis stands alone. That’s because it is correctly constructed. In a good thesis statement, there is no need to announce your presence with the word “I” (the reader knows you are the author from your title page), or announce your intent (the reader knows from your language whether you want to persuade, inform, entertain, etc.). There is no need to say, “I want to tell you about how great softball is; it is a lot of fun.” Refrain from this mind-numbing approach as well: “Some people think playing softball is easy, and this paper will tell you all about the game.” A good, strong thesis gets right to the job at hand:

Topic: Softball

Claim: For the dedicated player, softball is worth playing.

Direction: The focus is on three main points (reasons why the game is worth playing): *challenge, enjoyment, and camaraderie* – in that order.

Tone: Informative but not too formal. Positive. Effective.

Thesis statements must be *precise*. This is what I'm writing about, why I chose this topic, and how I'm going to explain my point of view. For example, "The Matrix is a good film," doesn't tell the reader much and the reader's response might be, "Oh, yeah, says who? Why is it so good?" BUT, if you wrote "The Matrix is a great movie because it is intense and thought-provoking, full of ambiguities about reality and truth," this gives the reader a good idea of what you plan to say about the movie in your essay.

Does this thesis statement do the four jobs it is supposed to do? What is the **topic** being written about? _____ What is the **claim** being made?

_____ In what **direction** will this essay head? _____

_____ And, finally, what type of **tone** is the writer trying to set? _____

Once you have your thesis statement, *stick to its direction*. This means that, if you wrote the above thesis statement, you would (1) introduce the film by saying when it premiered, who stars in it, what is its rating, and any other background information available; (2) end the introductory paragraph with your thesis statement; (3) use the next several paragraphs explaining how the movie is:

1. Intense
2. Thought provoking
3. Full of ambiguities about reality and truth

Thesis statements do not have to be difficult to write. Take it *slowly*, stick to the point. In the film, *Philadelphia*, Denzel Washington, playing an attorney, said to Tom Hanks, "Pretend I'm a six-year-old; tell me what happened, one, two, three." Remember this advice when you are writing your thesis and provide support for it in your paper! What is your essay about? One, two, three!