

The Thesis Statement

In academic writing, the thesis statement is typically the last sentence of the introductory paragraph. A thesis statement is most often explained as being the main idea or main argument of an essay. Here are some things to keep in mind when writing your thesis statement:

- The thesis should tell your reader what you are writing about and why you are writing about it or how you arrived at your point of view.
- It will answer the question that is being asked in your assignment, often, in a fairly direct way.
- It may also indicate to the reader the order in which the reader will find the support you will use in the body of the essay.
- The decisions you make when writing a thesis statement will likely depend on the type of essay being written.
- It is important to note that an essay will be either argumentative/persuasive or informative, and so, the thesis statement will also be either argumentative/persuasive or informative.
- Determining the purpose of your essay is an important first step to developing a thesis statement.

An effective way to write a thesis statement is to use what we call the **“turn-around” method**. This means that you take the question that is being asked, and you turn it around into a statement that answers the question.

If someone were to ask “what are good options for higher education in this area” a statement that answers that question might be “A good option for higher education, in this area, is Bucks County Community College because....”

There are a few things to notice in this example.

First, we used some of the exact phrasing from the question that is asked. This is perfectly fine—especially for a first draft. In future drafts, I might say “One of the best options” or “The best option.” I can work on being more precise and changing words to add emphasis in future drafts, but right now, I know that I am answering the question that is being asked, and that is the first job of a thesis statement.

Second, I am beginning to tell the reader why I feel the way I do. This is indicated with the word “because.” This “because clause” does not always have to begin in that way, but the “why” or your reasons, must always be included in the thesis statement. Be sure to review the ASC’s Transitions handout to explore options when it comes to introducing your “because clause.”

Here is an example of a thesis statement that has been revised for a more complete draft. Notice, it sounds very different from the first draft. It takes a slightly different approach, but it still answers the same question:

“If flexibility is a concern, the best choice for adult students pursuing higher education is Bucks County Community College.”

In this example, notice that the “why” has been placed at the beginning of the sentence. Also notice that I have narrowed the thesis to highlight a specific type of student. In writing the draft of my essay, I realized that all of my examples were related to adult students, so I took that information and refined my thesis statement.

In the early stages of writing a draft, the thesis statement is considered a **“working thesis.”** This means that the thesis is still moldable and will likely need to be adjusted in future drafts of the essay.

But what if your assignment is not asking a question?

Sometimes, the question we are being asked is not phrased as a question. Look for cue words like **analyze**, **explore**, **examine**, **discuss**, and **describe**. These cue words are verbs, and they are asking you to take some action; there is a question at the root of these instructions— we may just have to find it, and we do that by looking at the verbs. For example, “Describe your college experience” is asking, “what is your college experience?”

For a longer assignment prompt, you may have a multipart question that you need to answer, or you may have one central question and certain points to consider when answering it. Each of these will likely have verbs or action words, like those listed previously. Either way, a good first step is reading the entire assignment prompt and identifying the verbs or action words.

Just remember, each one of those verbs indicates an action you need to take, or an answer you need to produce. For more guidance on reading an assignment prompt, consult the ASC’s Understanding Cue words handout and work with a tutor to be sure that you have identified all of the points you need to consider while writing your thesis statement.

But what if I have an “open” assignment, and I get to choose the topic?

Again, there are two types of thesis statements: an argumentative thesis statement and an informative thesis statement. Your instructor will have likely indicated the approach you are expected to take with your assignment, and that will guide you with regard to which type of thesis statement you will need to write. If you are unsure, consult with your instructor. To brainstorm topics see the ASC’s [Pre-Writing Strategy handout](#) and work with a tutor.

An argumentative thesis statement will:

- State your main claim, which is debatable (or arguable).
 - This means that someone can disagree versus a statement that is undeniable fact (i.e. “Bucks is a community college” is not a debatable statement).
- Offer the reasons/evidence that support this claim.
 - Again, this is sometimes called a “because clause” though it does not always include the word “because.”
- Indicate the order in which you will present your support.
 - A listing thesis will give your reasons in an order that will inform your reader as to the order in which the evidence will be presented in the body of your paper.
If we look at the example used at the beginning of this discussion, a listing thesis, with that example, might look like this:

“A good option for higher education, in this area, is Bucks County Community College because of the scheduling flexibility, lower cost, and supportive environment.”

Step 1. Choose a topic: *barn owls*

Step 2. Focus the topic: *barn owls’ nests and farmers*

Step 3. Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question: Should farmers eliminate barn owl nests?

Step 4. Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement:

Barn owls’ nests should not be eliminated from barns [debatable issue] because barn owls help farmers

What the essay will do: the essay would explain *how* and *why* owls help farmers in this way by providing sources, examples, and support throughout the body paragraphs.

An informative (or expository) thesis statement will:

1. state what you are going to explain
2. outline the organization of your explanation

Step 1. Choose a topic: barn owls
Step 2. Focus the topic: lifestyles of barn owls.
Step 3. Narrow the topic further by posing it as a question: What are the lifestyles of barn owls?
Step 4. Answer the question. The answer is your thesis statement:
The lifestyles of barn owls [introduces topic] include hunting for insects and animals, building nests, and raising their young [states the explanation and outlines the organization].*

The type of thesis statement does NOT take a stand or make a claim that needs to be proved throughout the paper. Instead, it just reports facts found through research.

What the essay will do: this thesis statement establishes that the paper will provide information on the lifestyles of barn owls. Using the subdivisions in this thesis statement (hunting for insects and animals, building nests, and raising their young) the writer can create separate paragraphs for each category.

Keep in mind that this is a “listing thesis.” The support may not always need to be listed in this way; in fact, some professors prefer that these points are implied rather than stated in the thesis. For example, “Through an examination of the various habits of barn owls, one can understand their place in the ecosystem” is a statement that could be used for the same paper.

Either statement about barn owls could be used as a thesis statement. The essay associated with these statements will likely cover the same topic in the same way.

If you are unsure of your instructor’s expectations, be sure to ask. Either way, while creating a “working thesis” in the beginning stages of a draft, it can be best to start out with a listing thesis to be sure that your paper is well organized and that all supporting points relate directly to the thesis.

Practicing the Turn-Around Method

Remember, the **turn-around method** is one strategy to use when writing a thesis. This method of developing a focused thesis statement uses questions about the topic, and then turns the information around to form a statement that answers the question. For assignments, the questions will most likely be provided by your instructor. Again, keep in mind that the assignment prompt will not always be framed as a question, so look for the verbs or cue words.

Look at the following questions and statements. In the space provided, write a working thesis for each. Work

1. What book has had the most impact on you personally?

2. What person has had the most positive impact on society today?

3. Compare print books and e-books.

4. Explore the impact social media has on society.

Thesis Statement Checklist

The purpose of your thesis statement is to present the goal of the paper (argumentative direction) and forecast its content (to be covered in the body paragraphs). Once you have completed your thesis statement, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the thesis statement expressed concisely in one complete sentence?
- Is it supported by detail, facts, and examples within the body of the essay?
- Does it answer the assignment question?
- Does it make an argument and present a point of view ("yes," "no," OR "okay, but")?
- Does it go beyond announcing your topic by presenting "how" or "why"?
- Does it unify all ideas in your essay?
- Does it include only the ideas you explain fully in your essay?
- Does it fit the evidence used in your paper?
- Does it use specific language to connect to your paragraph's topic sentences?

Use the space below to brainstorm a thesis statement.

List 3 topics that you are interested in:

Pick one of those topics, and identify 2 debatable points related to that topic:

Choose one point that you want to explore further:

Why is this important:

In this exercise, notice the way the topic, which starts out broad, narrows down into something much more specific. It can be helpful to think of academic writing in terms of this upside-down triangle or funnel shape. Throughout the essay, we work to get more specific and focused, and that process often starts with the thesis statement.

Remember, that the thesis statement, is one of the most important parts of the essay, and at the early stages of writing, the thesis is considered a working or workable thesis. It is still moldable at this stage and it will likely need to change as our draft develops. Many times, writers are not sure what their exact point of view is until they have written the rest of the paper. Keeping all of that in mind, be sure to review your thesis statement at each stage of the drafting process.