

# How to Write a Thesis Statement

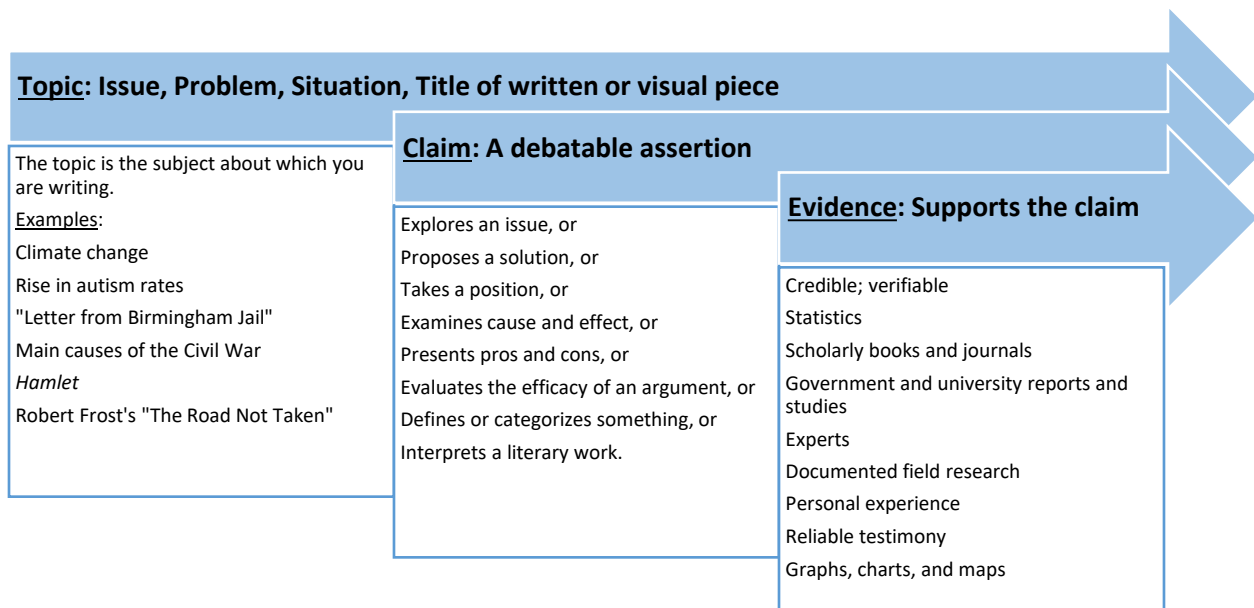
The word *thesis* is not one that is commonly used in our everyday speech; in fact, you probably do not hear the term outside of school. However, if you look closely, you will find that nearly every written and visual communication contains a thesis—a claim or assertion through which the author or visual media artist attempts to influence the audience to understand, believe, or act in a certain way.

As a student researcher and writer, your job is to present a persuasive argument about your own topic that will convince your audience to “listen” to you and believe what you say. To do so, you must state an arguable claim—the thesis—and support it with sufficient evidence along with well-developed interpretations of that evidence. In addition to making a claim, your thesis organizes your essay. The number of points supported by evidence that you include in the thesis depends upon your instructor’s requirements for the assignment. The thesis is usually located in the introduction of the essay, often appearing at the end of the paragraph; check with your instructor regarding his or her guidelines for the placement of your thesis.

Below you will find a breakdown of the different components of a thesis statement, guidelines for constructing an effective thesis statement, and criteria with which to evaluate your thesis statement to ensure that it is both properly constructed and effective.

## Anatomy of a Thesis Statement

There are three parts to a thesis statement: **topic + claim + evidence**. The diagram below provides examples of different types of topics, claims, and evidence. **The way you construct your thesis statement will vary depending upon the type of argument essay your instructor has asked you to write.** (See the Writing Center handout “Thesis Statement Types & Models.”)



## Constructing an Effective Thesis Statement

There are several steps involved in writing a strong and viable thesis statement. Check off each step as you complete it. (See *A Writer's Reference* pp. 86-89 for further tips and examples.)

- Determine your research question. What do you want to learn more about? What intrigues you or interests you about this topic? What do you want your audience to understand about this topic? Your thesis should **answer a question, explore an issue, resolve a problem, or take a position** in a debate. Having a clear research question will help to guide your research, thus saving you time.

*Example research question:* What are the effects of the administration's strict immigration policies on U.S.-citizen children whose parents face deportation?

*Example thesis statement:* Children whose undocumented immigrant parents face deportation experience an increase in depression and other mental health disorders, disrupted education, financial stress, and communication difficulties.

- Become familiar with the topic. The more you read and research about the topic, the more confident and prepared you will be in taking a stand and writing a clear thesis.
- Make sure there is enough information available on your topic in order to do sufficient research. A lack of adequate research will result in a weak paper; it will also be harder to write.
- Make sure you are using credible sources. Your instructor and the librarians can help you find sources, or the Writing Center tutors can help you decide if they are credible sources.
- Begin with a basic idea and be prepared to revise your thesis statement as your paper evolves. A tentative or working thesis will help you to organize your draft. Do not be concerned about the exact wording just yet.

## Evaluating Your Thesis Statement

Use the following criteria to make sure your thesis statement is both well-crafted and effective. Check off each item after you have answered it.

- Is your topic too narrow or too broad? A topic that is too narrow usually cannot present new information. A topic that is too broad offers too many options and can be vague, which makes it difficult to stay with one central idea. Limit your essay to explaining one major idea.
- Does your thesis statement make a clear claim? A claim takes an arguable position (more than one viewpoint) or expresses a unique perspective.
- Does your thesis pass the "so what?" test? If your thesis seems obvious or ordinary, it probably needs more work.
- Does your thesis statement use clear and specific wording rather than broad generalizations?
- Do you need to revise your thesis statement? As you work on your essay, the evidence to prove your claim may change, or you may discover a more interesting approach to your specific topic.