

**Writing**

**A**

**Thesis**



## **Table of Contents**

Each component listed in this Table of Contents includes information on the stated topic as well as examples to help you see what makes a good thesis statement and exercises to help you write your own strong thesis.

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## An Introduction to the Thesis

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**What is a thesis statement?** Put very simply, the thesis is the main idea of your paper. It specifically states the purpose of your writing, so that your reader will know what to expect. Your whole essay will be focused on expanding upon the thesis; in other words, every paragraph and every sentence of your paper will refer back to the thesis idea.

You can think of your paper as a castle in which the thesis is the king. Everybody in the castle works for the king, making sure that the king's will is done. Just like the people in the castle, the individual paragraphs of a paper are there to support the thesis (and to develop it.) Thus, for instance, if your thesis is "The TV show *Friends* should have ended its run in 1999, when it was at an all time ratings high," then every paragraph and every sentence in the rest of the essay should be centered around proving or explaining that idea.

### What should a thesis statement look like?

The thesis should be presented as one sentence which states your main idea clearly and in a way that is easy for readers to understand. Please note that, although very commonly the thesis will be the final sentence of the introduction paragraph, this is not a rule. The thesis can come in the beginning or middle of the first paragraph as well, and sometimes it can come later. When writing an essay, however, it is generally better that your thesis comes toward the beginning, so that your readers have a clear idea what idea or point you will be focusing on. Some instructors will specifically ask you to include the thesis as the last sentence in the introduction paragraph.

The thesis should not be:

Formed as a question

Underlined

Italicized

Bolded

### What are the main components of a thesis statement?

Generally, a thesis statement is made up of two parts: the topic and a point or argument about the topic. For instance in the thesis statement above ("The TV show *Friends* should have ended its run in 1999"), *Friends* is the topic and the writer's argument, or opinion, is that it should have finished in 1999. Reading this sentence, readers will know that for the rest of the essay the writer will explain why he or she thinks that *Friends* should have gone off the air at that time.

## An Introduction to the Thesis

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**You try!** Read the following introduction paragraphs and underline the thesis statement.  
*See the answer key at the end of this module for the correct answers.*

Comprehensive final exams are one of the cherished traditions of higher education. Institutions stop teaching and set aside entire weeks for these tests. Some even give students extra days without classes before exam week to prepare. Legends of all-nighters during this period abound. Clearly, many alumni hold fond memories of these academic hell weeks—of having survived and proved themselves. Yet maybe this tradition is dysfunctional.

Bill De Sam began his musical career in his hometown of Kindia, in Guinea, West Africa, in the early 1990s. After years of studying music on his own, and writing songs, he released his first album, *Sogolon*, in 1996, which combined traditional Malinke and Poular music of Guinea with a more modern, western rap style. The musical crossover won him widespread fame in Guinea and made him into a national star.

Eating more fat—not less—helps you keep weight off, according to new research from Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. Dieters followed either a moderate-fat plan (35 percent of calories from fat) or a low-fat one (20 percent of calories from fat.) While all participants lost about 10 pounds in a year, only the moderate-fat dieters kept that weight off. The low-fat dieters regained much of the weight by the study’s end.—(From Mindy Barry, “Finally—Good News About Fat,” *Glamour*, February 2002.)

## An Introduction to the Thesis

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**You try!** Here are six topics which need to be changed into thesis statements. Go ahead and incorporate the topics into complete sentences which state an opinion or idea.

*See **one** possible set of answers in the Answer Key at the end of this module.*

1. *Star Wars*

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2. Dogs

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3. The President

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4. My teacher

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5. Love

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6. Baseball

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## DECIDING ON YOUR THESIS

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Your instructor may assign you a particular topic to write about and sometimes even a specific thesis. In these cases, you should follow the idea that has been assigned. Most of the time, though, you will be coming up with your idea by yourself so you are going to need to take some time and figure out what you want to write about.

Make sure that you choose a topic and opinion that you care about. Otherwise, you might become bored with your topic (something that your writing may reflect, so be careful!)

In order to choose an idea for your essay (whether it be just a thesis or a topic plus a thesis), you will need to brainstorm. Here are some common brainstorming techniques:

### BRAINSTORMING METHODS

**Freewriting/ Free Association:** Sit down with a pencil and paper and write without stopping. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or punctuation. The point is getting out some good ideas, so free your mind from worry. Only you will be reading this. It sometimes helps to time yourself while doing this.

**Journal:** If you are keeping a journal, you've already written down many thoughts and ideas. Maybe you already have some good ideas there which you could develop further.

**Meditation:** Buddha did this to clear his mind, but you can use meditation to fill your mind with ideas. Sit down somewhere quiet by yourself and just think; decide what is important to you to write about.

**MIND-MAPS:** (also known by the names "Clustering," "Bubbles" and "Laddering.") You create a map of ideas. See an example at [http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/case\\_study/3a1.htm](http://www.lc.unsw.edu.au/case_study/3a1.htm).

**LISTING:** This is exactly what it says. List your ideas like a grocery list. You can list by topic, too, as in the following example.

#### FOODS I LIKE

Broccoli  
Pizza

#### FOODS I HATE

Avocadoes  
Deep Fried Twinkies

**TALKING:** Sometimes just having a conversation with a friend about your ideas can help you a lot.

**READING:** If you are interested in a particular subject, you can read more about it. Take

notes as you read. Notice any questions that you have while you read or anything that you would like to know more about. These questions and interests could end up giving you the topic of your essay.

## DECIDING ON YOUR THESIS

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**You try!** Use one of the brainstorming techniques listed on the previous page and come up with at least ten different topics. Choose one and write it here as a thesis statement. (Turning your topic into a thesis statement may involve some more brainstorming...)

## IDENTIFYING DIFFERENT TYPES

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Your thesis will look different depending on what type of essay you are going to write.

If you are writing a **Persuasive Essay** (also known as an Argumentative Essay), your thesis will have a very clear opinion that you will be backing up, such as:

Michael Jackson's behavior, whether criminal or not, is indecent and ought to be punished.

The Iraq War is an important part of the war on Terror.

While thinking about your thesis, you may want to consider the following formula:

**X** should/should not **Y** because **a, b, c**.

Smoking should be banned because it causes addiction, produces cancer, and costs society immeasurable amounts of money.

With this formula in mind, you will always be certain to include an assertion (**should/should not**) and support (**a, b, c**).

For a **Comparison/Contrast essay**, you will need two different components to look at, such as:

Peter Jackson's film version of The Lord of the Rings falls very short of the expectations raised in J.R.R. Tolkien's novels.

Wendy's hamburgers are much better than Burger King's hamburgers.

If you are writing a **Personal Narrative**, your thesis may even be implied. This means that no actual sentence gives your point, but your story itself will very clearly be making one point, even if the point is only that you were very happy the day that you overcame your fear of karaoke and sang "Ice Ice Baby" in front of a crowd.

**Whatever you do, make sure that your thesis matches the type of essay that you are writing.**



## NARROWING THE THESIS

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In order for your thesis to work, you will need to make sure that it is very specific. This is called narrowing your thesis.

For example, one student brainstormed about things that she liked and she finally decided to write about “dogs.” This is a good general topic for an essay, but imagine if she didn't make it more specific. To write a good essay about “Dogs,” she would have to consider all the many breeds of dogs in the world, the life of dogs, how dogs behave, what they eat, where they come from. Even a 300 page book wouldn't be able to cover such a general topic.

Probably, for your first essay you don't want to write a book about a general subject. That is why you must narrow your topic. Take your general idea, and break it down to one main idea that you want to talk about. For instance, if your topic is dogs, you can brainstorm for more specific main ideas like “Small dogs are more fun than big dogs” or “How dogs have babies.”

Remember that a person reads an essay expecting one main idea and one idea only. If you want to write everything imaginable about your topic, either write a book or write several different essays.

### STUDENT STORY

One student in an English class wanted to write about cocktails. He had been a bartender and he knew a lot about cocktails. When he turned in his paper for the first time, the teacher was astonished. Not only was it longer than any of the other papers at seven pages (the teacher had asked for three!) but he tried to explain everything: the many different types of cocktails, their ingredients, how to make them. He even explained the history of cocktails and where the name came from! It was written well, and the information was interesting, but the teacher was overwhelmed. It was too much information!

## NARROWING THE THESIS

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**You try!** Look at the following thesis sentences. Rewrite them so that they are specific.

*See the Answer Key at the end of this module for some possible answers.*

1. I like all kinds of sports.

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2. Helmets can help people be safe.

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3. Smoking is harmful to people's health.

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4. Cloning is a controversial topic.

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5. There are many ways to learn to write.

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## **NARROWING THE THESIS**

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You try! Go ahead and write your narrowed-down thesis.

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## ANSWER KEY

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### Page 4

Comprehensive final exams are one of the cherished traditions of higher education. Institutions stop teaching and set aside entire weeks for these tests. Some even give students extra days without classes before exam week to prepare. Legends of all-nighters during this period abound. Clearly, many alumni hold fond memories of these academic hell weeks—of having survived and proved themselves. Yet maybe this tradition is dysfunctional.

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## ANSWER KEY

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### Page 5

1. *Star Wars*

Star Wars is the best science fiction movie of all time.

2. Dogs

Dogs are better pets than cats.

3. The President

The President is a good man who has strong pride in his country.

4. My teacher

My teacher is too demanding.

5. Life

Life is like a box of chocolates.

6. Baseball

Baseball is America's favorite pastime.

## ANSWER KEY

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### Page 10

1. Soccer is the most important thing in my life.
2. People should wear helmets for safety whenever they ride a bicycle.
3. (This is actually specific, but smoking is an overdone topic. In other words, people have written so much about smoking that you will need to find a more interesting topic. For example: The effect that smoking has on the mental health of smokers is not talked about as much as the effects on health, but it can be just as dangerous.)
4. Biologists face a moral dilemma when it comes to cloning.
5. If people start writing early, they will find it a very easy task.