

WRITING (OR REVISING) A THESIS STATEMENT

Step I: Preparation

Most academic writing requires you to have an argument, typically presented near the end of your introduction in the form of a strong, well-revised thesis statement, which you will then back up with evidence in the body of your paper. In addition to presenting your argument, the thesis statement also provides an organizing principle for the entire paper.

Before drafting your thesis statement, you need to have a good idea of what you want to say and what kinds of evidence you will use to support your ideas. If you are using outside sources in your paper, you should review them carefully before constructing your thesis statement. You will need to be able to summarize the authors' main ideas or arguments.

To clarify your understanding, try using these sample sentences to articulate the authors' ideas for each of the sources you are using:

The author believes _____ about _____ because _____.

The author shows us that _____ is true about _____ by presenting/describing/analyzing _____.

Step II: Brainstorming

In order to make sure that your argument is sound, and as a means of generating some ideas for your essay, try one of the following exercises:

- A. Underline each of the key words or phrases in the assignment and your sources. These could be people, places, things, or ideas. Write something about each one. Work quickly, spilling out everything you know about that person, place, thing, or idea.
- B. Imagine that your topic is the subject of a conversation among several people: you, the author(s) of your text(s), and an average, intelligent person. What do each of these participants say or assume about this topic? Whose analyses, descriptions, or opinions are similar to yours, and whose are different? Try using these sample sentences to articulate your answers:

Most people think/assume _____ about [my subject], but [another author] believes _____ because _____. My position is _____ because _____.

[One author] thinks _____ about [my subject], but [another author] believes _____ because _____. My position is _____ because _____.

- C. Explain what is important or significant about your particular contribution to this conversation. Why is it important for your readers to consider what you have to say? What would happen if your position were widely read and accepted? What would happen if it weren't?

Part III: Writing Your Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement is the driving force behind your entire essay. In one sentence, placed at or near the end of your introduction, you will clearly articulate the argument that you will spend the rest of the paper supporting. The wording is important, because you need to make sure you don't leave anything out, while still keeping it as concise and specific as possible.

1. In one or two sentences, summarize the main thing that you want to say in your paper. Try using these same sentences to get started. The part of the sentence that starts and ends with an asterisk (*) is the kernel of your thesis.

I want to persuade my readers that *_____*

I want to describe/analyze _____ to show my readers *_____*

I want to compare _____ with _____ to show my readers *_____*

Examples:

I want to persuade my readers that children should not be allowed to vote.

I want to describe the love scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* to show my readers that Shakespeare had an ironic sense of humor.

I want to compare Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's music to Biggie Small's music to show that music with a message is still relevant.

2. A good thesis statement says something that you believe, but with which others might disagree. Therefore, a thesis cannot be a sentence which simply states a fact.

Example:

In today's society, children are not allowed to vote.

States a fact; not a thesis.

Children should not be allowed to vote.

States a position; thesis.

3. Check what you wrote in exercise one above. Is it a statement of fact or a thesis? Look at the part of the sentence that is double-asterisked; could someone else potentially disagree with it?
4. Write your thesis statement so that it explains why you believe what you believe. Take the kernel of your thesis (the part that is double-asterisked) and add a clause beginning with "because."

Example:

Thesis - Children should not be allowed to vote.

Better Thesis - Children should not be allowed to vote because they are not mature enough to handle the responsibility of voting.

5. Review what you wrote in exercise IIB. Then try to write your thesis so that it shows how your thesis agrees or disagrees with other people's opinions on this topic.

Example:

Better Thesis - Children should not be allowed to vote because they are not mature enough to handle the responsibility of voting.

Best Thesis - Although Vita Wallace argues forcefully for children's rights, children shouldn't be allowed to vote because they are not mature enough to handle the responsibility of voting.