

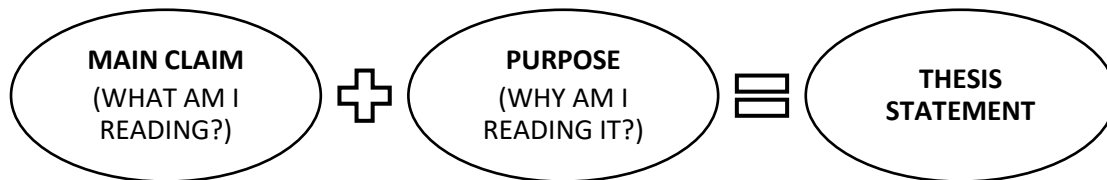
# Thesis Statements FAQ

This cheat sheet discusses the basics of thesis statements: [what they are](#), [why they're important](#), [what makes a strong one](#), [how to create one](#), [how to address common issues](#), and [a worksheet to help you get started](#). As always, this is general information, and if your instructor has specific instructions or preferences, make sure to follow those!

## What is a thesis statement?

A thesis is a statement that expresses your essay's central argument and main ideas to your audience or reader. A thesis statement is not merely a topic or subject. It does start there, but it also contains a main claim and a purpose. This means you go beyond simply talking about a subject or topic to *interpreting* it through a certain lens or perspective.

A thesis statement should adequately answer the assignment prompt, but it should also answer 2 main questions for the reader: What am I reading (that's where your main claim comes in), and why am I reading it (that's where your purpose comes in)? Adding these components together equals a strong thesis statement.



Thesis statements are brief, typically 1-2 sentences long. They are typically found near the end of an essay's first introductory paragraph. This location allows room to introduce the subject and provide context before stating your thesis, but it also situates your thesis early enough to provide the reader with a guide to your essay. Sometimes instructors provide specific instructions on where to place a thesis statement, but if not, the end of that first paragraph is usually a safe and predictable bet.

Do keep in mind that not all papers require an explicit thesis statement. For example, nursing class essays often lack a thesis, and narrative essays often include an implied thesis or main lesson near the end. This document focuses on explicit thesis statements, but if you are unsure of the instructor's specific expectations, please ask them directly!

## Why are thesis statements important?

Thesis statements can seem intimidating or scary because of their importance, but they are here to help us all! Here are 3 main categories of importance:

1. **Thesis statements are important for the essay itself.** Thesis statements are the backbone of academic essays. Without a thesis, the essay will lack a cohesive argument. Here are 3 analogies describing the function of a thesis statement within an essay:
  - a. First, we can think of a thesis statement like the sun in our solar system. Just like how all the planets orbit the sun, the different parts of an essay all revolve around the thesis statement. The sun provides energy to all the planets, just like a thesis statement provides the driving force to all the paragraphs.
  - b. Second, we can think of a thesis statement like a thread carefully woven throughout the essay from start to finish. This thread seamlessly passes through each paragraph, tying everything together into one finished product or essay.
  - c. Third, we can think of a thesis statement like the foundation of a building. Thesis statements provide crucial structure to an essay just like a foundation provides structure to the rest of the building. If a building doesn't have a strong foundation, the rest of the floors will be shaky and unstable. The same goes for an essay.
2. **Thesis statements are also important for the writer during the writing process:**
  - a. In the pre-writing stage, creating a thesis statement can help you decide what you are writing about and narrow down the focus. It can also set parameters on an outline, guiding the layout and organization of the overall essay.
  - b. In the writing stage, a thesis statement is like a guiding North star. It provides direction for each individual paragraph and helps you decide which information is relevant to include. This encourages you to stay on topic and write with purpose.
  - c. In the revision stage, a thesis statement can help you assess the strength and focus of your essay. When reviewing your paper, make sure that each paragraph relates directly to the thesis—explaining, supporting, arguing, or somehow interacting with it. If a particular paragraph, or even a particular sentence, isn't directly related to the thesis statement, that's a sign it needs to be revised.
3. **Finally, thesis statements are important for the reader!** When someone reads a paper, they'll want to know the main point and purpose early on. A thesis statement explains what will be discussed and sets the reader up for the rest of the essay. It helps them know what to expect and not to expect from the writing, and it informs the reader of how the writer will be interpreting the subject matter at hand.

### **What makes a strong thesis statement?**

We like to use the acronym "CLASS" to describe the typical qualities of a strong thesis:

**Confident.** Thesis statements should make a strong assertion and express conviction. A reader should have no trouble discerning the main argument and purpose of the essay from the thesis.

**Limited.** A thesis statement should be narrow in scope and specific enough that it can delve beneath the surface of a topic. If a writer tries to cover too much ground in a thesis statement, chances are they won't be able to go very deep.

**Arguable.** A strong thesis statement will inspire conversation and deliberation. It should take a firm position that others might challenge or oppose. What's the point of discussing something that everyone already agrees with?

**Succinct.** The thesis statement is brief and clear. While it's important to provide enough detail, too much can quickly become confusing and overwhelming. A strong thesis statement provides just enough information without over-complicating the message.

**Supported.** Thesis statements are designed to answer a question or prompt, and part of providing a full answer is explanation. This could look like providing evidence or statistics, listing main reasons, or connecting to a relevant larger issue. In other words, strong thesis statements typically provide proof and back up their claims.<sup>1</sup>

Creating a strong thesis statement is much like the story of Goldilocks and the 3 bears. In the story, Goldilocks finds herself in several situations where one thing is too small or too hot, another is too large or too cold, and the last one is just right landing somewhere in the middle. The same goes for thesis statements: it's important to find that sweet spot between being too short or too long, too broad or too complicated, and so on and so forth.

## How do I create a thesis statement?

There are many different approaches and methods to create a thesis statement, and there is no one-size-fits-all method. The first step is typically to pick a general topic (or use the one assigned by the instructor). From there, you can start to narrow it down.

Remember that there are many ways to arrive at thesis statements, and it's not necessary to form a perfect, complete thesis before moving forward in the writing process. It is usually helpful to start with a working thesis (which is essentially a rough draft of your thesis), but as you gather evidence and flesh out your arguments, it's natural for the thesis to evolve and need adjustments.

See the next page for an example of how to narrow a general topic into a strong thesis statement!

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<sup>1</sup> The use of supporting explanation makes this a "closed" thesis statement. On the other hand, an "open" thesis statement states the argument *without* including any specific supporting points. Closed thesis statements are more common at ARCC, but neither is inherently better than the other—it is just a matter of instructor preference and assignment instructions. If you are unsure, please ask your instructor for confirmation!

### **Food and diets**

- This is the general topic. Try narrowing it to a specific food/diet and population.



### **Excess sugar consumption in teenagers**

- This is much more specific, but it's still just a topic. Sometimes it's helpful to research more information or facts on the topic to help create a thesis.



### **Studies show that the average teenager consumes twice the recommended daily amount of sugar, mainly through sweetened drinks.**

- This is a good start to a thesis statement, but it needs to go beyond a statement of fact. What could be done about this issue?



### **We should reduce sugar consumption in high schools.**

- This moves us even closer by taking a clear stance, but a reader might be left wondering, “How?” What are some possible solutions to reduce sugar consumption in high schools?



### **High schools should only offer water in their cafeterias and vending machines.**

- Not only is this a specific proposal, but it is also debatable; chances are not everyone agrees or likes the idea of only serving water at high schools. Now is the time to put everything together, including that statistic!



### **Because the average teenager consumes twice the recommended daily amount of sugar—with sweetened beverages as the main culprit—high schools should only offer water in their cafeterias and vending machines.**

- This is a strong thesis that is clear, limited, argumentative, succinct, and supported!

## What are some common issues with thesis statements?

Problem + Solution	Example	Revised Version
Too broad or vague ➔ Narrow the focus	School uniforms are a pretty good thing overall.	Uniforms should be mandatory at high schools because they directly improve academic performance, belongingness, and school image.
Too complicated ➔ Limit the scope of focus	The proposed tax cuts could mean Americans paying less, but it would also mean cuts to education, healthcare, and veteran benefits. It could also exacerbate income inequalities, but the tax cuts could benefit poor Americans who need to keep every dollar they can.	The administration's proposed tax cuts should not be passed because while they may reduce the tax burden on America's working class, it comes at the steep cost of sacrificing dozens of crucial education programs that directly benefit students from working class families.
Common knowledge or fact ➔ Find a disputable angle	Cigarettes are harmful to one's health, and they are taxed heavily at both the federal and state levels.	Heavy taxes on cigarettes disproportionately affect the poorest Americans and rarely deter purchases; instead, the federal and state governments should invest in more early education programs to help prevent these populations from ever taking their first puff.
Announcements ➔ Remove first-person language	In this essay I will summarize the main reasons why people in Venezuela have trouble accessing healthcare: low income, expensive medicine, and not enough hospitals.	Healthcare remains inaccessible to the average Venezuelan citizen due to low personal incomes, high costs of medicine, and a lack of federally funded hospital systems.
Lack of context or purpose ➔ Answer "Why?" and "So what?"	Exploring outer space is a waste of time, energy, and money.	Exploring outer space is a waste of time, energy, and money because these resources need to be utilized for the immediate threat of global warming here on Earth.
Asking a question ➔ Answer the question with a specific claim	Jan Ritten's book <i>Working Woman</i> supports gender equality at work, but why does she exclude transgender women?	In her debut novel <i>Working Woman</i> , Jan Ritten espouses radical gender equality in the workplace; however, she explicitly excludes transgender women, rendering the text neither inclusive nor revolutionary.

## **Thesis Statement Worksheet**

**Topic:**

**Narrowed topic:**

**Main claim (answers the question “What am I reading?”):**

**Purpose (answers the question “Why am I reading this?”):**

**Thesis (main claim + purpose):**

### **CLASS checklist:**

- ☐ Clear
- ☐ Limited
- ☐ Arguable
- ☐ Succinct
- ☐ Supported