

Write a strong thesis statement!

What is a thesis statement?

- It is usually a single sentence at the end of your first paragraph that presents your argument to the reader.
- The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

The thesis statement is the “road map” of your paper, directing you as you write it and guiding the reader through it.

Do

- Know your essay’s type.
- Make a statement.
- Make a debatable claim.
- Be specific

Don’t

- Announce the thesis, e.g. *“This paper will discuss....”*
- Announce yourself, e.g. *“I am going to prove that....”*
- Ask a question.
- Leave your reader asking “How?” or “Why?”

Your history professor assigns a five page paper in which you must analyze why the North and South fought the Civil War. What would a good thesis statement look like?

Bad:

The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

This statement is too general and simply rephrases the prompt. It does not answer how or why their reasons differed.

Better:

While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.

This sentence offers a more specific and debatable answer. However, it is still too broad and insupportable. You cannot defend a claim of morality in a five pages, and good research would probably not lead you to this conclusion.

Best:

While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.

This statement is specific, clear and thoughtful. Though some might disagree with your stance, your readers will know what to expect in your paper. Now it's up to you to defend your thesis with good evidence and persuasive writing!

Types of Essays

- Analytical
 - Breaks down and evaluates an issue.
 - Example thesis statement: Shaped by religious tradition and belief the supremacy of Western culture, 20th century United States foreign policy has reinforced racism against the Middle East.
- Argumentative
 - Makes a claim about a topic and defends this claim
 - Example thesis statement: High school graduates should be required to take a year off to pursue community service projects before entering college in order to increase their maturity and global awareness.
- Expository
 - Presents facts and research on a subject.
 - Example thesis statement: The life of the typical college student is characterized by time spent studying, attending class, and socializing with peers.