Thesis Statements

A thesis statement is a statement in an essay that you plan to support, discuss or prove.

Ask yourself - **Is my thesis debatable?** The answer must be “Yes!”

Characteristics of a Thesis Statement

- Only one topic (your subject) + your comment (point of view)
- At least one verb
- A focus narrow enough that it can be developed in the assigned length of the essay (e.g. 750 words or approximately 3 pages)
- Not a simple announcement

**Useful Hint:** To be sure that a thesis statement is debatable, you can use the word *should* or *must* in your statement.

Compare these two statements:

1. **There are bad consequences to plastic surgery.**
   A simple announcement.

2. **Plastic surgery should be illegal.**
   Debatable statement with topic (plastic surgery), verb (should be), and a point of view (illegal).

Developing a Thesis Statement

First, you need a topic.

**Example:** Topic you have in mind and need to narrow down = Drug Use

This subject is too broad for an essay of 750 or 1000 words, so you need to narrow the focus to a specific aspect of drug use.

**First attempt** at a thesis statement: Bad drug use.
Rejected - this is still too broad a topic.

**Second attempt:** Drug use is detrimental to society.
Rejected - this is not an idea presented in debatable form. Most people would agree with this statement.

**Third attempt:** Illegal drug use is detrimental to society because it encourages gang violence.
Accepted - the statement has a clearly focused topic and a debatable opinion. The topic of drug use has been narrowed down to illegal drugs and the detriment has been narrowed down to gang violence. This is a much more manageable topic. This narrower topic will allow you to support your point of view and offer your own conclusion on the issue.

Do not confuse the thesis statement with the topic sentence:
- A thesis statement must be **debatable**, but a topic sentence does not have to be.
- A thesis statement uses many ideas and it applies to a whole text or presentation, whereas a topic sentence applies to one paragraph only.

**Thesis Statement Rules**

In order to develop an effective thesis statement, here are some rules:

1. **A thesis statement must be expressed in a complete sentence.**
   The following are **not** thesis statements:
   - Homeopathy. (just one word, the general topic)
   - Violence in cities. (no verb, just a topic)

2. **A thesis statement is not a personal preference.**
   The following are **not** thesis statements:
   - Judo is a good activity.
   - Rap music is the best music in the world.
   
   These statements express personal preferences, not a structured analysis, and they might be difficult to explain with serious factual support. Essays should avoid general words like *good, better, best,* and *interesting* because it makes the focus hard to see as these terms mean different things to different people.

3. **A thesis statement is not a question.**
   The following are **not** thesis statements:
   - How can you cure your fear of snakes?
   - Does Sylvia Path announce her suicide in her poem "Lady Lazarus"?
   
   A question does not offer your point of view.

4. **A thesis statement is not a fact.**
   The following are **not** thesis statements:
• Water is in short supply in the Middle East.
• Dr. Oliver Sacks’ book is a best-seller.

A fact is not a debatable statement. There is nothing left to write.

5. A thesis statement does not simply announce the topic.
The following is not thesis statement:
• I am going to write about a boy on a boat in the book *Life of Pi*.

Exercise
Look at the above examples (1~5) of non-thesis statements. Compose a thesis statement for each example.

Persuasive Essays
A persuasive essay is an argumentative paper that tries to sway the reader's opinion towards the opinion of the writer. Therefore, the thesis statement will express an opinion, an attitude, or an original idea on the topic or on a piece of literature.

The thesis statement can be controversial, and some people will not agree with it. For example:

All athletes should be required to take a drug test before any sporting event to ensure equal competitive opportunity for all competitors.

The most effective way to decrease Youth Violence is to eliminate all violent video games.

Reference