

THE THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement is the main point or idea of an essay, article, book, etc. It is not simply a topic, such as “dogs” or even “guard dogs.” Rather, it is an idea, opinion, or conclusion about the topic which can be developed, demonstrated, or argued, for example: *Guard dogs can be vicious, and therefore must be well trained.* The thesis statement makes the central idea of a piece of writing apparent.

The thesis statement limits the subject of the composition and the scope of the point to be developed. A proper thesis should be neither too broad nor too vague; it should be clear and specific, give direction for the development of the composition, and correspond to the desired length of the essay. If the thesis statement is too broad, there will not be enough room in the paper to develop it: *“Dogs have evolved to serve people,”* for example, is the thesis statement of a book, not an essay. If the thesis statement is too vague, the focus of the paper will not be clear, and the writing will be difficult. *“Dogs are useful animals”* sounds like the opening of a disorganized list of hazy examples; it provides no perspective or focus for the composition. The thesis statement is considered complete only if it contains enough elements of support (or support and limitation) to give organizing guidance to the essay.

A proper thesis statement serves both the reader and the writer. For the reader, knowing what to expect greatly helps comprehension; even a controversial thesis benefits from clear presentation. The thesis makes the point of the paper clear and indicates how the point will be made. The writer can better concentrate on the paragraphs to follow, and organizing and making transitions is easier. The seven qualities of a good thesis statement are outlined below.

QUALITIES OF A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT

1. A good thesis statement is best expressed in a complete sentence – not a question.

- a. *Is it hard to make financial decisions?* **Poor: No opinion**
- b. *Making financial decisions is difficult for many people because they are confused by the number of investment choices that are available today.* **Improved: Complete sentence**

2. A good thesis statement is clear and has parallel construction.

- a. *Dewey successfully argues that the three most important lessons a child should learn are to read, to sing, and he also should be able to draw.* **Ambiguous: Requires second reading**
- b. *Dewey successfully argued that the most important lessons a child should learn are reading, singing, and drawing.* **Improved: Parallel grammatical structure**

3. A good thesis statement focuses on a specific, narrow aspect of the topic.

- a. *The Bible is read by many people.* **Poor: Vague**
- b. *The Bible provides historical and geographical assistance to certain archaeologists.* **Improved: Clear and specific**

4. A good thesis statement is not obvious.

- a. *Good nutrition is important.* **Poor: Too obvious**
- b. *Improper nutrition causes serious dental problems, even among affluent peoples.* **Improved: Less widely known**

5. **A good thesis statement can be defended by reason rather than by emotion.**
- a. *Spicy food is revolting.* **Poor: Too emotional**
 - b. *Some people find highly-seasoned dishes indigestible.* **Improved: Can be defended by reason**
6. **A good thesis statement sets forth the writer's point of view.**
- a. *Scotties are popular pets.* **Poor: No point of view**
 - b. *Scotties make good pets because they are gentle, intelligent, and loyal.* **Improved: Point of view**
7. **A good thesis statement sets the pattern for the paper to follow by indicating the supporting topics that will be developed in the body of the paper.**
- a. *Autobiographies reveal significant facts about the author's experiences.* **Poor: No pattern indicated**
 - b. *Since the three types of autobiographies mirror their author's experiences, any autobiography can appropriately be entitled, "What I Did," "What I Saw," or "What I Felt."*

NOTE: This last thesis statement meets all the criteria of a good thesis: It is clear, specific, limited, and not obvious; it can be defended by reason; it indicates a point of view; and it indicates the pattern for the paper's development through its key words.