

Thesis Statements Deconstructed

A *thesis* is the roadmap for the paper, representing the path of your argument to the reader. It is an arguable assertion that can be proven with evidence and opinions, and it is **most often placed at the end of the introductory paragraph.**

WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

- A thesis lets the reader know what to expect or look for in the essay.
- A thesis helps you narrow down a more general topic, find your own angle, and express your opinion.

WHAT DOES IT CONSIST OF?

A thesis statement is typically made up of three different parts:

- Topic (What subject are you talking about?)
- Claim (What do you believe about the topic?)
- Support (How will you support your claim?)

Example: The drinking age (topic) should be lowered to 18 (claim) because at that age, people get other adult responsibilities, including the right to vote, ability to join the armed forces, and potential to go to jail (support).

Thesis = topic + claim + points to support the claim

WHAT DO EFFECTIVE THESIS STATEMENTS LOOK LIKE?

An effective thesis should:

- *be an argument, not a fact*

Too Factual: The first polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.

Revised: Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, even under controlled conditions, its use by private employers should be banned.

- *be contestable, not a universal truth*

Not Contestable: Although we have a right to say what we want, we should always avoid hurting others' feelings.

Revised: The "fighting words" exception to free speech is not legitimate because it wrongly considers speech as an action.

- *be sharply focused, not too vague or general*

Too Vague: Many music videos are disgusting.

Revised: Many music videos are sexist because they objectify women, focus on their body parts, and reduce their role in society to a sexual one.

- *suggest the flow of the paper by presenting points of support*

Not enough specific support: None of the arguments in favor of regulating pornography are persuasive.

Revised: None of the arguments in favor of regulating pornography are persuasive because they all base their points on the unverifiable assumption that producers of pornography harbor ill will toward women.

- *when possible, use an "although . . . actually" format*

This format is an efficient way to present the **counterargument** to your claim.

Example: *Although* many people believe that extraterrestrials and crop circles are a figment of the imagination, there is *actually* strong evidence suggested by collective, distinct anecdotes that alien encounters are real.

Note: "actually" isn't always necessary; it is often implied with the clause "although."

PERSUASIVE/ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS EXAMPLE:

Writing Prompt: Educators often discuss the impact of high school sports on students. In your opinion, do high school sports have a positive influence on students?

ID-Identify topic

Participation in high school sports

Claim-What you believe

Playing a sport has a very positive influence on teens

Direction- general reasons you believe your claim is true

- *Teach social skills*
- *Promote time-management*
- *Provide exercise and teach benefits of hard work*

Thesis:

High school sports unquestionably have a positive influence on high school students because they teach social skills, reinforce time-management skills, provide exercise and show the benefits of hard work.

YOUR RESEARCH PAPER:

ID-Identify topic

Claim-What you believe

Direction-The general reason you believe your claim is true

Thesis:

Adapted from <http://schoolwires.henry.k12.ga.us/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE: “THE THESIS TEST”

1. Is it a complete sentence (and not a question)?
2. Does it have an opposing or counterargument?
3. Is the claim understandable and not too vague?
4. Does it call for more explanation and evidence rather than stating a fact or universal truth?
5. Does it include support or proof for the claim it is making?

HOW DO YOU CONSTRUCT A THESIS FOR A *NARRATIVE ESSAY*?

Even though a narrative essay tells a story, and therefore isn't always making a claim that can be proven with clear cut reasons, the story should still always have a point. This point should be expressed in the thesis statement, which could offer a lesson learned, set the scene, or identify a theme.

Example 1: A thesis for an essay about how you responded to peer-pressure could be: *The night I got caught driving without a license, I learned that I shouldn't do whatever my friends want me to do.*

Thesis = Topic (I got in trouble driving without a license as a result of peer-pressure) + **Lesson Learned/Theme** (I shouldn't do everything my friends tell me to do)

Example 2: A thesis for an essay about a challenge you have overcome could be: *Although taking swimming lessons was one of the most challenging parts of my childhood, it provided useful skills and good habits that will last a lifetime.*

Thesis = Topic (challenge of learning to swim) + **Lesson Learned/Theme** (the benefits of learning to swim made the effort worth it)