Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?
A thesis statement is a one or two sentence summary of the message of your essay or paper.

Why should I write a thesis statement?
- It will test your ideas by distilling them into a sentence or two.
- It will help organize and develop the argument using ideas, facts, and details that explain or clarify your main idea.
- It lets your readers know what your point is and makes it easier for them to follow your train of thought.

When should I write the thesis statement?
Some people choose to write their thesis statement before they begin to write their paper so they have a map or blueprint for writing. Others prefer to write their thesis statement after they have researched their topic and developed an outline. As you write and revise, you may adapt, correct, or change your thesis statement as your ideas become more accurate. **Caution:** Do not attempt to write a thesis statement until you have explored the topic using a prewriting technique such as brainstorming, mind mapping, or researching.

Where do I put it?
The thesis statement almost always comes at the end of the introduction. Good introductions contain a series of statements that become gradually more specific and end in the thesis statement. The thesis statement is often re-stated in the conclusion of the paper.
How to create a thesis statement if the topic is assigned:

Reduce the assignment request to a single question. The answer to the question is the thesis statement for the essay.

*Example:* “Write a report to the local school board explaining the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class,” turn the request into a question like:

Q: “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?”

A: “The potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class are . . .”

OR

A: “Using computers in a fourth-grade class promises to improve . . .”

How to generate a thesis statement if the topic is not assigned:

Your thesis statement still needs to answer a question about the topic you’d like to explore. In this situation, your job is to figure out what topic you’d like to write about.

A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes:

1) the chosen topic allows for debate
2) deals with a topic that can be adequately treated given the nature and length of the assignment
3) express one main idea
4) assert your conclusions about the topic

*Examples:*

**Dull & Vague**
Grass is important in the African savanna.

**Precise & Dynamic**
Grass is the essential element in the African savanna’s system of nutrient recycling.
Unified & Supportable

Protecting the African savanna ecosystem is fundamental to the survival of many unique species of plants and animals.

So what would be a good thesis statement for the topic of cancer in teens?

“Radiation therapy for teenage cancer patients may have adverse effects on the patients’ general health, mood, and appearance.”

Notice that it has a precise, limited topic:

radiation therapy for teenage cancer patients

it has a position:

adverse effects

it outlines the parts of the essay’s body:

general health, mood, and appearance.

Thesis Statement Tips

1. A thesis statement is not written in stone. Don’t get so attached to a thesis statement that you refuse to change it as your ideas change and develop.

2. Writing the working thesis on an index card and keeping it in front of you during the writing process will help you maintain your focus.

3. Avoid announcements unless specifically required by your instructor. E.g. This paper will discuss the effects of radiation on teen cancer patients.

4. A thesis statement should be as clear and specific as possible. It should cover only what you will discuss in your paper and should be supported with specific evidence.

5. The thesis statement usually appears at the end of the introductory paragraph.
6. Avoid stating facts that need no support or development. E.g. *Cancer patients must often undergo radiation treatments.*

7. Avoid statements that are vague or cover huge areas of knowledge. E.g. *Cancer treatments are difficult for patients.*

8. Avoid statements that are not specific or are obvious. E.g. *Cancer treatments are difficult for patients.*

9. A thesis statement is never a question. It should be a statement, or the answer to a question.