An effective thesis statement presents the main idea of an essay or research paper. Located in the introductory paragraph, the thesis states the main point of the essay. In addition to keeping you on target while you write, your thesis statement tells your readers how you intend to approach your topic.

Throughout the paper, your thesis promises your readers that you will prove specific facts or develop certain ideas; therefore, every paragraph, sentence, and word in your paper must relate to this controlling idea. Think of your paper as a human body, and your thesis statement as the spinal cord. Without it, there is no structure.

The thesis statement in a five-paragraph paper usually has three main subtopics (many of you have probably heard of the “three-point thesis statement” – this is the same concept and typically appears at the end of the introductory paragraph, following an opening generalization and background information.

An example of a thesis statement with three subtopics is:

The new Writing Center at Tarrant County College South Campus is the best one in the country because of the cozy environment, the cutting edge grammar-based software, and the friendly, hardworking tutors.

The main topic explores the idea that new Writing Center at TCC South Campus is the best one in the country, and the subtopics further expand this opinion with three distinct examples: 1) the cozy environment; 2) the cutting edge software 3) the friendly, hardworking tutors.

For you as a writer, the thesis statement:

- Develops through the interrelationship of thinking, reading, and writing;
Limits your research by providing you with one controlling main idea that intrigues you;
Narrows your writing to one specific claim that you can develop or prove;
Organizes your ideas so you know the important points you want to make in your paper; and
Clarifies your writing by keeping you on target to fulfill your proposed purpose.

For your readers, the thesis statement:
Identifies the main point and subpoints of your essay clearly and quickly;
Functions as a road map so your readers can easily follow your ideas; and
Gives satisfaction at the conclusion of the paper when your readers discover you have fulfilled your promise by proving or developing your main point.

Characteristics of an Effective Thesis Statement:
1. An effective thesis statement prepares readers for facts and details, but it cannot itself be a fact. It must always be an inference that demands proof or further development.

   Too Factual: Tarrant County College has 5 different campuses.

2. A good thesis should narrow, and not too broad.

   Too Broad: College students have a lot of responsibilities.

3. A strong thesis statement should be sharply focused and not too vague.

   Too Vague: Students are affected by problems with families, teachers, and the media.

If you can write an effective thesis statement for a five-paragraph essay, you can use the exact same formula to write a five page paper, a twenty-five page paper, or even an entire book!

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