# Thesis Statements

# What is a thesis statement?

The word “thesis” comes from the Greek language, and it means “a placing or a position.” In academic essays, the thesis statement explicitly states the main idea or argument of an essay. It is not just a statement of the topic the essay will discuss; it is a mention of the topic plus the writer’s position on the topic which will be further explained, emphasized, and proven within the body paragraphs. The entire essay works to argue for the thesis statement and explains why the thesis statement is a good argument. The goal of the whole essay should be to convince the reader that the thesis statement is correct.

# What kinds of thesis statements are there?

There are two types of thesis statements.A **Listing** thesis previews the major points of the essay. Example: “Creating dungeon-type prisons would provide just punishment for criminals, deter crime, and save money.” An **Umbrella** thesis makes a statement that covers or suggests the major points of the essay without explicitly stating them. Example: “Creating dungeon-type prisons would eliminate the major shortcomings of our present rehabilitation-type prisons.” Out of these two styles of thesis statements, the best is the umbrella type thesis because it allows for further exploration of the topic outside of the points previewed in the listing type thesis.

**A thesis statement should do the following:**

* Indicate the general direction or opinion on a topic
* Assert a proposition that is discussable
* Commit the writer to a workable main idea
* Obligate the writer to focus details, explanations, illustrations, and points in support of the argument.
* Be specific
* Be arguable
* Provide a brief list that preview the major points or make a statement that suggests or make an “umbrella” statement that encompasses or suggests the major points.

**A thesis statement should not do the following:**

* Express an incomplete or fragmented thought or idea.
* Thesis statements cannot be facts because facts cannot be argued, they are truth.
* The thesis statement cannot begin with phrases like -- “This essay will be about”; “The thesis statement is”; “I think”; or “In my opinion.”
* Be a question, but rather be the answer to a question.
* Be too broad or general
* Must not contain unrelated elements

**Note**: A good thesis statement is hard to come by and may go through several revisions before it is solid enough for a final draft. Compose a “working thesis” or a rough draft of the main idea you hope to prove which can be revised later. This can help you get started with writing, working through the idea as you attempt to prove it.

# Examples

**Poor**: How life is for children in urban America.   
(This thesis is a fragmented idea. How is life for children in urban America exactly?)

**Better**: Children who live in America’s inner-cities lack an appreciation for the sanctity of human life.

**Poor**: Do Americans really need large refrigerators?

(This thesis is a question and does not tell the reader the position of the writer.)

**Better**: The human health risks and environmental hazards posed by large refrigerators outweigh the benefits.

**Poor**: Crack addicts should not have children.

(This thesis lacks an arguable claim. Most people would agree with this statement.)

**Better**: To decrease the number of crack-addicted babies, the government should begin sterilizing any women caught possessing cocaine.

**Poor**: America’s university system is plagued with problems.

(this thesis is too broad and vague. A good thesis needs to be specific in its claim. What specific problems will the essay focus on? Financial? Social? Educational?)

**Better**: The constant decreasing of funds for America’s universities is jeopardizing the integrity of higher education and America’s future.

**Poor**: All novelists seek the truth, and some novelists are good psychologists.

(Though the writer may have an idea of how these two things relate, the connection between truth-seeking novelists and physiologically inclined novelists is not clear and seem unrelated.)

**Better**: In their attempt to probe human nature, many novelists become excellent psychologists.

**Poor**: In my opinion, smoking should not be allowed in any public space.

(Using phrases like “in my opinion” or “I believer” makes the argument sound weaker, as if the reader does not have to agree, but the goal of the essay is to convince the reader. Thesis statements sound much stronger without these phrases)

**Better**: Smoking should not be allowed in any public space.