



# Thesis Statements

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## What's a thesis and why do I need one?

A thesis consists of two parts: the topic and the comment. The topic statement is what you are going to write about, and the comment is the point you are making about the topic. A thesis is simply the main argument or point in your paper, which you will support with the evidence you provide. Even if you are not doing an argumentative paper, you must still have a central point that unifies your work. Without a cohesive thesis statement it is easy to wander off topic or slap together a bunch of ideas that are only loosely connected. A thesis also helps your reader to follow your train of thought.

## How do I write a thesis?

Don't attempt writing your thesis statement until you have explored your topic through research and brainstorming. You can't take a position until you've done your research!

A thesis comes at the end of your introductory paragraph, after a general opening sentence, and a more specific sentence that states the works you will be writing about. The thesis is often restated in a concluding paragraph.

Write a thesis using these four steps:

1. Re-state the assignment or topic.
2. Take a position on the issue.
3. Briefly state your reasons why/how.
4. Revise: take out any wordiness or vague ideas, and make sure the thesis relates to the topic.

Example:

**Assignment:** Discuss the issue of identity in *In Search of April Raintree*.

1. Identity in *In Search of April Raintree* is...
2. Important...
3. Because April's negative perception of her mixed heritage leads her to unhappiness.

**Working Thesis:** Identity in *In Search of April Raintree* is important because April's negative perception of her mixed heritage leads her to unhappiness.

This thesis is weak in two spots. First, why should we care if April is unhappy? We should care because it relates to the theme of identity in the book. Second, April isn't always unhappy but finds a kind of happiness.

4. In *In Search of April Raintree* April tries unsuccessfully to repress her Native heritage and pass as white, but she is not happy until she acknowledges both aspects of her heritage.

## What does a good thesis look like?

A good thesis statement must be unified, precise and dynamic. It also has to be something you can support with evidence, and be limited enough to cover adequately in the number of words allowed for the paper.

### **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.

*cannot be proven, unmanageable*

Attitudes about love vary.

*manageable, supportable*

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley discusses Romantic attitudes about the relationship between physical beauty and love.

## Tips

1. A thesis statement is not written in stone. Don't get so attached to a thesis 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. Avoid stating facts that need no support or development e.g. *Cancer patients must often undergo radiation treatments.*
5. Avoid statements that cover huge areas of knowledge e.g. *Cancer treatments are hard on patients.*
6. Avoid statements that are obvious e.g. *Cancer treatments are hard on patients.*

**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*

Notice that it has a position:

*adverse effects*

Notice that it outlines the parts of the essay’s body:

*general health, mood and appearance.*