

# A Guide to Writing Basic Thesis Statements

## **What is a thesis statement?**

A thesis statement is the central claim of an argument. It is your position or opinion in the form of an objective claim.

It may help if you think about the thesis statement in terms of being a roadmap or guide to your paper; when constructed properly, it will inform your readers on how you will navigate them through your argument.

Another way to approach the concept of the thesis statement is to think of it in terms of an analogy of a preacher or politician who says: “Here’s what I’m going to tell you.”<sup>1</sup> This is the goal of the thesis statement; it is your announcement to your reader: “Here is what I’m going to tell you.”

## **It is important to understand the difference between a TOPIC and a THESIS STATEMENT.**

A topic is a subject or idea you wish to explore further. A thesis statement is a particular argumentative stance you will be taking on a particular subject. Racism, for instance, is a topic. A thesis statement about racism could be: *While racism remains a problem in America, it can be reduced or potentially eliminated through the effective implementation of diversity training programs in schools and corporate institutions.* Notice the difference; the thesis statement informs a position about the topic, but the topic is not itself a thesis statement.

## **The KEY to writing a good thesis is to UNDERSTAND THE ASSIGNMENT!**

For instance, an assignment which asks you to develop an argument explaining the rhetorical structure of an article (i.e. a rhetorical analysis), is vastly different from one that expects you to perform a close reading of a text. Be sure that you are clear on what your instructor expects. If the assignment is unclear or vaguely worded, go talk to the instructor. This will clarify his/her expectations for the assignment and it will show that you are taking an active interest in your work (this is a good thing!).

## **Okay, I understand the assignment, now how do I get started?**

Use these 3 steps:

- (1) brainstorm what you think
  - (2) refine your idea
  - (3) rewrite your idea in the form of a central claim
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*Let's consider an assignment for a Sociology class that asks you to construct a response to the problem of racism on our college campus.*

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### **Step 1: Brainstorm what you think**

You write, "Racism remains a problem on our college campus."

While this is a good start, it is not a well-defined thesis. In fact, it merely restates the assignment.

What you need to do now is brainstorm. Why do you think this about the topic you have been given? What is your opinion on this topic? How will you support your opinion? What facts and examples can you give?

Try writing these questions out on a sheet of paper and then listing your answers to them. You will use these answers to formulate a stronger thesis.

### **Step 2: Refine your idea**

One successful method to do this is to use the following model:

On a sheet of paper write "I think that \_\_\_\_\_."

Fill in the blank with your initial brainstorm idea; in this case "I think that racism remains a problem on our college campus." While, at this point, you have only rewritten your rough idea, now it is beginning to take the shape of a thesis.

Next, continue building your thesis by completing this model:

I think that racism remains a problem on our college campus because \_\_\_\_\_.

You then write:

I think that racism remains a problem on our college campus because the college does not require mandatory diversity training for all of its students.

Okay, now you're getting somewhere. Let's reword your thesis to make it sound more "academic."

### **Step 3: Rewrite your idea in the form of a central claim**

We need to get rid of "you" to make the thesis statement sound more like a central claim and less like a personal opinion. To do this, simply remove the "I think that" from the sentence:

*Racism remains a problem on our college campus because the college does not require mandatory diversity training for all of its students.*

Congratulations, you now have a thesis statement.

—by MICHAEL NOSCHKA, NC State University, Fall 2007—

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#### HELPFUL LINKS:

Examples of strong versus weak thesis statements are available at the Indiana University Writing Tutorial Services website at

<[http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis\\_statement.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml)>.

For examples of thesis statements written for literary topics, see the UNC Writing Center website at <<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/thesis.html>>.

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#### USEFUL ARTICLES (for tutors):

Noteboom, Jay. “An Experiment in Thesis: A Universal Approach.” Community College Frontiers (1975). ERIC. EBSCO. DH Hill Lib., Raleigh, NC. 29 Nov. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>>.

Rae, Colleen. “Before the Outline--The Writing Wheel.” Social Studies 81.4 (1990): 178. ERIC. EBSCO. DH Hill Lib., Raleigh, NC. 29 Nov. 2007. <<http://search.ebscohost.com/>>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Colleen Rae’s Article, “Before the Outline—the Writing Wheel,” *Social Studies*, 81.4 (1990): 178.