

Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

- The claim that you want to make about your topic. What you plan to argue and how you are going to do that.
- Answers the questions: What are you trying to prove? What is significant or important about your claim?
- It is not a topic or fact; rather, it is an arguable claim.

What makes a good thesis statement?

- Specific and clear. Has a definable and arguable claim.
- Only covers what you will discuss in your paper.
- Is concise and uses a powerful, active verb.

How do I write a thesis statement?

- Read the assignment's directions. Determine the kind of paper you are writing and make sure your thesis statement/argument fulfills the assignment's requirements.
- Once you have a topic (or if assigned one), ask yourself "What are the questions that arise for me about this topic?"
- Anticipate counterarguments to help you refine your thesis and think of the arguments you will need later in your paper.
- You often won't have a final draft of your thesis the first time. As you do research and your topic evolves, make sure you revise it to fit what your paper says.
- Often the last sentence of your introductory paragraph/s.

Examples of weaker vs. stronger thesis statements:

Weaker: In the U.S., mega-churches are thriving while more traditional churches are shrinking.

Stronger: Although overall church attendance has declined in recent years, mega-churches continue to grow in membership because their worship styles and ministries appeal to a consumeristic society.

Weaker: "Daughter Zion" is an important metaphor for understanding God and women.

Stronger: The phrase "Daughter Zion" merges gender and space in a metaphor that carries both positive and negative portraits of Yahweh and ancient and modern women.

Weaker: Congregations that authentically follow Jesus will work to bring about the Kingdom of God here and now.

Stronger: A congregation that authentically follows Jesus will reacquaint itself with the truly radical Jesus and the people who he identified with, form relational partnerships with marginalized community members and the agencies that serve them, and fight institutional injustice and racism as a way of bringing about the Kingdom of God here in this time and place.

How to Organize a Paper

General Tips

- Construct your entire paper to support your thesis.
- Aim to organize all matter in a logical or cohesive way.
- Each paragraph should have 1 focus.

Introduction

- Think of your introduction like a funnel.
- Typically provides some background or context for your topic before signaling what the focus of the paper will be. May state the significance of your topic or thesis.
- May be easier to write the introduction at the end, or at least to write an outline first, so you know to what you are introducing your readers.



Body

- Aim to structure the paragraphs to build on one another and show the relationships between ideas in your paper. For example, go from general to specific or weakest claim to strongest claim.
- The body is where you: use your research (if any) through paraphrasing or direct quotations (always cite), put sources in conversation with one another, and show how sources support your analysis and claim.
- Can use transitional words to help signal the relationship between ideas and supporting points (ex. first, second, additionally, however, nonetheless, etc.).

Conclusion

- Provides a brief summary of your claim—more fully than in the introduction.
- Emphasizes the significance of your argument and to/for whom it matters.
- May: connect your reader to the thesis, point out additional applications and/or suggest new research, but does not make new claims.

How to ensure logical organization

- Before writing, create an outline: Brainstorm (list all ideas that you want to include in your paper), Organize (group related ideas together), Order (arrange material in subsections from general to specific or from abstract to concrete), Label (create main and sub headings).
- After writing, create a brief reverse outline: in the left-hand margin, write down the topic of each paragraph; in the right-hand margin- write down how the paragraph topic advances the overall argument of the text. Tells you if each paragraph fits in the overall organization and if paragraphs should be shifted. You should be able to summarize quickly—if not, revise.
- Watch out for wordiness, repetition, varied sentence and quotation length.
- Reread then: revise, rewrite, move around, or delete unnecessary sentences or paragraphs.

Sources and Useful Resources: owl.purdue.edu, writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu