Writing a Strong Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is one or a few sentences sentence that express the main ideas of your paper and answer the questions posed by your paper. Some thesis statements offer readers a quick and easy to follow summary of what the paper will be discussing and what you as a writer are setting out to tell them.

This handout will include strategies for writing thesis statements for three common types of academic papers: expository, analytical, and argumentative.

General Tips

- A thesis statement generally consists of two parts: your topic, followed by the analysis, explanation(s), or assertion(s) that you're making about the topic.

- A thesis statement is a **specific** statement. It should cover only what you want to discuss in your paper and must be supported with specific evidence. The scope of your paper will be determined by the length of your paper and any other requirements that might be in place.

- Often, a thesis statement appears at the end of the first paragraph of an essay so that readers will have a clear idea of what to expect as they read.

- You can think of your thesis as a map or a guide – both for yourself and your audience.

- As you write and revise your paper, it's okay to change your thesis statement – sometimes you don't discover what you really want to say about a topic until you've started (or finished) writing! Just make sure that your "final" thesis statement accurately shows what will happen in your paper.

Expository (Explanatory) Thesis Statements

An expository paper explains something to the reader. An expository thesis statement explains:

1. What you are going to explain
2. The categories you are using to organize your explanation
3. The order in which you will be presenting your categories

Example: The primary habits of barn owls include hunting for insects and animals, building nests, and raising their young.

Questions to ask yourself when writing an expository thesis statement:

- What am I trying to explain?
- How can I categorize my explanation into different parts?
- In what order should I present the different parts of my explanation?

Analytical Thesis Statements

An analytical paper breaks down an issue or an idea into its component parts and evaluates the issue or idea for the reader. An analytical thesis statement explains:

1. What the paper will analyze
2. The parts of your analysis the reader should expect
3. The order in which the analysis will be presented

Example: An analysis of barn owl flight behavior reveals two kinds of flight patterns: patterns related to hunting prey and patterns related to courtship.

Questions to ask yourself when writing an analytical thesis statement:

- What did I analyze?
- What did I discover in my analysis?
- How can I categorize my discoveries?
- In what order should I present my discoveries?

Argumentative Thesis Statements

An argumentative paper makes a claim about a topic and justifies this claim with reasons and evidence. This claim could be an opinion, a policy proposal, an evaluation, a cause-and-effect statement, or an interpretation.

An argumentative thesis statement tells your reader:

1. The claim or assertion
2. The reasons/evidence that support this claim
3. The order in which you will be presenting your reasons and evidence

Example: Barn owls' nests should not be eliminated from barns because barn owls help farmers by eliminating insect and rodent pests.

Questions to ask yourself when writing an argumentative thesis statement:

- What is my claim or assertion?
- What are the reasons I have to support my claim or assertion?
- In what order should I present my reasons?