

## Guide to Writing Thesis Statements

A thesis statement responds to the question posed by the assignment: it offers a falsifiable (or at least contestable) claim that is supported by evidence. Essentially, the thesis statement is your argument writ small. The thesis clearly states your answer to the question and includes a brief preview of the reasons for this answer. The thesis statement should be in the introductory paragraph of your paper: social science is NOT about suspense. Be as clear, direct, and concise as possible.

### Examples of good thesis statements:

- *The ability to purchase television advertising is essential for any candidate's bid for election to the Senate **because** television reaches millions of people and thus has the ability to dramatically increase name recognition.*
- *The organizational structure of the United Nations, namely consensus voting in the Security Council, makes it incapable of preventing war between major powers.*

### Basic Guidelines for Thesis Statements:

1. **Thesis statements must make a claim or argument rather than merely stating facts.**

They are not statements of fact (because you couldn't write a paper about a statement of fact). Reasonable people should be able to disagree with you.

Examples of statements of fact which are NOT good thesis statements:

- a. *"A candidate's ability to afford television advertising can have an impact on the outcome of Congressional elections."* This is essentially an indisputable point and, therefore, not a thesis statement.
- b. Similarly, the claim *"The United Nations was established to promote diplomacy between major powers"* is not likely to inspire much debate.

2. **Thesis statements are not merely opinion statements.**

The key difference between an opinion statement and thesis statement is that a thesis conveys to the reader that the claim being offered has been thoroughly explored and is defensible by evidence. It answers the "what" question (what is the argument?) and it gives the reader a clue as to the "why" question (why is this argument the most persuasive?).

Examples of a statement of opinion which are NOT good thesis statements:

- a. *"Congressional elections are simply the result of who has the most money."* This statement does make a claim, but in this format it is too much of an opinion and not enough of an argument.

- b. Similarly, "*The United Nations is incapable of preventing war*" is closer to a thesis statement than the factual statement above because it raises a point that is debatable. But as it is written here, it doesn't offer the reader enough information; it sounds like the author is simply stating a viewpoint that may or may not be backed up by evidence.
- 3. Your thesis statement should clearly state your argument AND provide the reader with some indication of why your argument is persuasive.**

Recall our Good Examples from above:

- a. *The ability to purchase television advertising is essential for any candidate's bid for election to the Senate **because** television reaches millions of people and thus can dramatically increase name recognition.*

This thesis statement establishes why money is important rather than just saying it is. Think about what kinds of evidence would support this claim: you could see if there was a correlation between candidate spending on television ads and votes, look at voter surveys to see where voters obtained their news, or discuss historical examples that demonstrate the importance of television to name recognition. The paper would need to demonstrate/argue for the claim that purchasing advertising on television—rather than other mediums—leads to victory. The paper might also consider whose money is more important (the candidates' official ads or special interests' "issue ads") or perhaps whether other factors (such as candidate positions on issues) are relevant.

- b. *The organizational structure of the United Nations, namely consensus voting in the Security Council, makes it incapable of preventing war between major powers.*

Once you've got this provisional thesis statement, you should consider what kinds of evidence you would need to demonstrate why the United Nations is not capable of preventing war. But your thesis has indicated that you have an understanding of the relevant historical circumstances and context, and that you are aware of alternative explanations.

Of course, one can re-work a thesis statement indefinitely and one can almost always find something at fault with it. The point is that you must be sure that your thesis statement indicates to your reader that you have an argument to make.