

Thesis Statements

A thesis statement gives the central claim of a paper. It tells the reader what to expect in reading your paper. The thesis directly answers a question. This question can be of your own making or a prompt by the professor.

The thesis statement is usually found at the end of the first paragraph: the introduction.

Before attempting to form a thesis statement, be sure you understand the assignment.

The form of the thesis statement depends on the type of paper you are writing: expository, analytical, or argumentative. Are you giving an overview, deconstructing a text, or defending a position?

An expository essay describes or explains an idea, concept or situation. The thesis is factual (not an opinion) and informs the reader of what will be revealed in the essay. It should pique the reader's curiosity and entice him/her to read the paper.

An analytical essay breaks the idea, concept or situation into its smallest sections for analysis. The thesis statement asserts the writer's main take on the evaluation and hints at connections among the small sections and with the work as a whole.

An argumentative essay takes a stand on the idea, concept, or situation. It attempts to persuade the reader to agree with the writer's position. The thesis statement gives the writer's point of view and how he/she will go about proving it.

Tips

Your thesis should not be obvious/self-evident. You do not want the majority of readers to agree with you without even reading the paper.

Your thesis statement should be specific, not general.

Finally, you should review your thesis statement when you have finished writing the essay.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Does the thesis accurately reflect your paper?

Have you stayed on topic or have you strayed into strange territory?

This is an opportunity to make sure that the body of the paper and the thesis statement are a good match.

Examples

The following examples are based on Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" (1729). This work is a classic example of satiric social comment. Giving vent to his frustration over English disinterest in the plight of the Irish, Swift suggests that poverty stricken Irish families could sell their year-old babies to the English as meat. Despite the horrific nature of the proposal, his argument is calm, organized and entirely reasonable.

Expository

Question/prompt: How does Jonathan Swift present his plan in "A Modest Proposal"?

Thesis statement: In "A Modest Proposal" Jonathan Swift lays out detailed arguments to justify his horrific plan.

The following essay would elaborate on the various arguments.

Analytical

Question/prompt: How does Jonathan Swift employ rhetoric in "A Modest Proposal"?

Thesis statement: An analysis of Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" reveals the great lengths he went to make a ludicrous plan sound reasonable.

The following essay would examine forms of rhetoric such as tone, style and logic.

Argumentative

Question/prompt: Examine Jonathan Swift's use of a fallible narrator in "A Modest Proposal".

Thesis statement: Although he goes to great lengths to present a cool, unfeeling narrator in "A Modest Proposal", Jonathan Swift's own voice breaks through in several places.

The following essay would highlight the instances in which Swift's real feelings are apparent and suggest the effect this has on the work as a whole.

References:

Swift, J. (1729) A modest proposal. In H. Rosengarten & J. Flick (Eds.), (1998). *The broadview reader* (pp. 338 – 347). Broadview Press.

