

Vocabulary Building

American Academic Audience – Readers in American education or academics (college or universities, research groups, etc.). A broad group with certain expectations of how a paper should be written.

Cultural Preference – Something a culture values over other options. What is seen as good or acceptable (and likewise not good or not acceptable) based on culture.

Topic – What the author is generally discussing in the paper. Someone or something that the paper is about.

Author's Main Point – Specifically what the author says about the topic. An opinion or statement of fact that is the author's argument or discussion in the paper. What the author is trying to show in the paper.

Thesis Statement – A sentence (or sentences, but generally one sentence) that clearly states both the topic of the paper (what the paper is about) as well as the author's main point (opinion/facts/argument) about the topic.

Claims of Support – Explanations, details, facts, or evidence that support the thesis of the paper, or that support the topic sentence of a paragraph. The author's "proof" or explanation of their main points.

Are there more unfamiliar words?

Look up words you don't know on the Merriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary at www.learnersdictionary.com.

Want More Practice?

There are staff in the Learning Center who would love to help you with your writing!

The College Skills Zone

The College Skills Zone is a great place to engage in conversations that help you understand concepts, especially some basic grammar concepts, and then practice those skills. The College Skills Zone is a place where you can just drop in anytime during open hours.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center assistants are trained to help you with any aspect of the writing process, from understanding an assignment, to brainstorming, to revising your essays. You can drop in during open hours or make a 30-minute appointment for a specific time.

English Language Learner Specialist

A specialist for English Language Learners, Sarah Mosser, is available in the Learning Center during certain hours for drop-in or appointments. Because her schedule varies, it is best to make appointments.

Sarah Mosser

Instructional Specialist–ELL
mossers@linnbenton.edu

Linn-Benton
COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WRITING CENTER

Organization

Thesis Statements



Go-To Guides

Go-To Guides are designed to help in all areas of the writing process.

A Brief Explanation

American academic readers expect authors to state their points directly and usually at the beginning of a paper. We want to know the topic and the author's main point right away. This is a cultural preference, and many cultures do not use thesis statements, or maybe don't expect them at the beginning of a paper. Other cultural styles are equally valuable and powerful—but an American academic audience expects a certain amount of directness. When writing for a specific audience, it's best to consider the expectations of that audience.

The thesis statement provides a map, or guide, for the paper. It states the main point that the author will explain in detail later on and is usually found at the end of the introductory paragraph. Sometimes when you are reading, you may find a thesis somewhere other than the introduction, but when you are first learning how to use thesis statements in your papers, it might be best to place it where the reader would most expect to see it—at the end of your introductory paragraph.

A strong thesis statement should:

1. Be specific. What specifically are you trying to communicate to the readers in this paper? What are your main claims or points that you explain later in the paper?
2. Pass the “how” or “why” test. If a reader is left wondering “how” or “why” after they read a thesis, the thesis might be too open-ended. A strong thesis should include claims of support that you will explain in detail in your paper.
3. Reflect the organization and main ideas of the paper. A thesis should only include what you discuss in your paper, and likewise, the main points of your paper should be included in your thesis. This allows the reader to understand what they should expect from your essay.

Tips for Writing a Strong Thesis Statement:

1. Research, brainstorm, and outline your paper first. What do you think is your main idea? What is the one thing you want your reader to understand after they read your paper? Make sure the thesis includes your main points and claims in the paper.
2. Revise! Sometimes papers can go in a different direction than originally planned. When you are finished with a first draft, revise your thesis to match your paper. Does your paper cover everything that you stated in your thesis? Are there any main points you ended up discussing in your paper that are not in your thesis?

Examples

1. **Paper topic:** My transition into college

Main points of paper: 1) College is more stressful than high school. 2) College is more demanding than high school. 3) I am adjusting well.

Weak thesis statement: My transition into college is hard.

Strong thesis statement: Though college is both more stressful and demanding than high school, I believe I am adjusting well.

What's wrong? The weak thesis statement, “My transition into college is hard” is very broad. In what way is it hard? The weak thesis statement also doesn't cover a main point, that the author is adjusting well to college despite the fact that college is more stressful and demanding.

2. **Paper topic:** Fast food

Main points of paper: 1) Childhood obesity can be directly linked to over-consumption of fast food. 2) Childhood obesity caused by eating too much fast food leads to many health problems, including diabetes and heart disease later in life.

Weak thesis statement: Too many parents allow their children to eat fast food.

Strong thesis statement: Parents of small children should eliminate the regular consumption of fast food; too much fast food leads to obesity and numerous preventable health problems.

What's wrong? The weak thesis statement does not say “why” fast food is a problem for children, or even really that eating fast food is a problem. It only says that children are eating fast food. The strong thesis statement makes a claim—that parents should stop feeding their kids fast food on a regular basis and gives a reason why.

3. **Paper topic:** The Revolutionary War

Main points of paper: 1) The British colonized the Americas largely for revenue, and gave huge tracts of land to British citizens. 2) The British government spent a lot of money protecting colonists from Native Americans and fought a very expensive war in the Americas on behalf of the colonists. 3) The colonists, though they enjoyed British luxuries, did not feel like they should have to pay taxes for the services they received.

Weak thesis statement: The Revolutionary War was not only about freedom.

Strong thesis statement: Though American society often thinks of the Revolutionary War as a war against tyranny and oppression, it is not often recognized that the British government may have had legitimate reasons to tax the colonies for services and protection that they provided.

Try it Out!

True or False?

1. T F A thesis statement should be vague.
2. T F In American higher education, a thesis statement should come only at the end of a paper.
3. T F Thesis statements help readers understand the author's main point and what the author wants to say about the topic.
4. T F Thesis statements cover the points that the author will explain in further detail later on.
5. T F Some cultures don't expect writers to state their main points in the paper at all, and this is clearly inferior to American academic writing.

ANSWERS: 1. F 2. F 3. T 4. T 5. F

What's wrong?

Identify the problem with the following thesis statements, and then try rewriting each thesis to make it stronger.

1. Thesis: There is a big debate about whether colleges should provide e-textbooks or not, and I think that they should.

Main points of paper: a) e-textbooks are more affordable than traditional textbooks, b) e-textbooks are more convenient for the student, and c) e-textbooks are lighter weight.

2. Thesis: I have many things in common with the author of the essay.

Main points of paper: a) The author of the essay overcame a major fear. b) There was a time in my life when I was afraid to do something, and c) I overcame that fear.

3. Thesis: The federal government should work harder to eliminate pollution to both protect the environment as well as the health of the general public.

Main points of paper: a) There is a lot of pollution, b) the federal government could do more to curb pollution, and c) many animals are dying because their environment is being polluted.