

THESIS STATEMENTS

What's the point? What are you trying to convince me of, and how? Why should I, your reader, care? These are the questions a thesis statement in an argumentative paper must answer. Your thesis will be the point your entire paper is designed around, the idea you are trying to support. Fortunately, you can follow these steps to make this process easier:

Step 1 – Identify the topic: Figure out what you are going to write about. Read the prompt given by your professor, and identify what most interests you about it.

Example: In a history class, you are assigned to write a paper on the Roman Empire. You decide that you are most interested in writing about their decline, when everything went to hell for them.

Step 2 – Come up with an argument: The next step is to come up with the argument. Remember that you can't merely describe the topic here. As the word "argument" suggests, the thesis has to state something that some readers might agree with, but others might not. When you're brainstorming ideas, ask yourself: If I said this in class, would everybody nod their heads, or would somebody disagree with me?

Example:

"The Epic of Gilgamesh is the story of Gilgamesh's quest for immortality." This is not an argument. It's just a statement, a summary of the book.

"In The Epic of Gilgamesh, Gilgamesh's quest for immortality represents the human fear of death and the desire to be remembered." This is an argument. You are saying something very specific, and can provide evidence to support it.

Step 3 – Brainstorm some evidence: While research will mostly come later, think about the reasoning behind your argument. What convinced you of your argument? Write that down; this evidence will form the basis of your body paragraphs, but knowing it now will help you write a specific, informed thesis statement.

Example: You are writing a paper critiquing a drug trial. You identify three primary flaws with the study, the ones that made you decide to write against it. The first is that the researchers chose a sample size of only 10 people. The second is that they gave all ten the same drug. The third is that they only monitored the subjects for two months. These are three pieces of evidence you can put in your thesis.

Quick Tip: Use confident language in your thesis statement. Don't say "It might represent..." or "The USA probably should..."

Step 4 – Write the sentence: Now, it's time to write the actual sentence. The sentence doesn't have to be too long, but it must include your topic, your argument about the topic, and a snapshot of your evidence.

Examples:

"The Roman Empire ultimately went into decline because it overextended itself, which caused corruption, waste, and a lack of new resources."

"In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh's quest for immortality represents the human fear of death and the desire to be remembered, because as king of Uruk, Gilgamesh is a stand-in for all human beings."

"Tyler Chemical's results are biased and unsafe, because the company used a sample size of only ten people, had no control group, and was conducted over a period of only two months."

Further Resources

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/1/>

Tardiff, Elyssa and Allen Brizee. "MLA Works Cited: Electronic Sources (Web Publications)." *The Purdue OWL*. Purdue U Writing Lab, 21 Feb. 2013. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.

http://www.writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Thesis_or_Purpose.html

"Thesis and Purpose Statements." *The Writer's Handbook*. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, 2 July 2012. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.

<http://www.writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/Thesis.html>

"Developing a Thesis Statement." *The Writer's Handbook*. The University of Wisconsin-Madison Writing Center, 2 July 2012. Web. 11 Nov. 2013.