What Is a Thesis?

The thesis, or thesis statement or thesis sentence, is the most instructive sentence in an essay. It contains the central claim or main argument for the essay. Usually included in the introduction part of the essay, the thesis serves as a guide for the entire essay, letting the reader know what he/she will gain by reading the whole text. The thesis can also serve as a forecasting sentence that outlines the organization of a piece of writing.

It is important to note that the thesis is not the same as the topic. The topic is the general subject or idea you plan to explore in your essay. The thesis is a specific claim or argument you make within the topic. For example, the topic of your essay may be “house pets.” The thesis needs to contain an argument about house pets. For instance, “Cats make better house pets than dogs because they normally do not chew on furniture or require a lot of maintenance, and they are loyal companions.” Notice how this sentence makes an argument in favor of cats over dogs, but is still within the topic of house pets.

There is no single, correct format for creating a thesis; however, here are some basic guidelines:

- 1-2 sentences, but not an entire paragraph.
- Located near the end of the introduction. It does not have to be the last sentence of the first paragraph, but does need to be before the first body paragraph.
- Triangulate the thesis. In other words, include three important components in your thesis (from least to most important) and maintain the same order throughout the essay.
- Use clear and direct language.
What to Include in the Thesis

Before you conduct research, think about the topic and come up with a specific point you believe that you can argue on paper and within the given page numbers for the writing assignment. Do not provide factual information in the thesis; one cannot argue facts, only opinions and assertions.

For example, these are facts:

- Writing is a form of communication.
- The Cardinal is the official State Bird for North Carolina.

In contrast, these are arguable claims:

- Writing is an ideal form of communication in that it removes body language, strictly focuses on the words and their meanings, and directly connects the author and reader.
- The Bluebird should be the State Bird for North Carolina rather than the Cardinal because it sings more beautifully, is more attractive, and keeps unwanted pests out of gardens.

Each of the facts in the first set of bullets can be proved and verified when repeated. However, the arguable claims need to be supported by data, statistics, and statements from other experts in order to be convincing.

How to Formulate the Thesis

To begin your thesis, start by completing the following sentence: “What I want to say is...” Then, start conducting research to see if your argument can be supported by other scholars and experts. If you find little or no research supporting your point, it might be a good idea to revise the thesis. This is okay and it happens frequently. If the essay does not require research, begin brainstorming ideas to support the thesis. If you cannot generate three supporting points, revise the thesis.

After having completed research and brainstorming, go back to the thesis sentence and delete the words “What I want to say is”. Then, what is left is the thesis.