

The Thesis Statement

After your prewriting, audience analysis, feedback and maybe even preliminary research, you should be ready to take the next step: formulating a thesis statement. Although many of your assignments and essay exams in college will provide a thesis for you, it is still important for your college career and especially for your professional career to be able to state a satisfactory controlling idea or thesis statement—*the presentation of your position on an issue*—that unifies your thoughts and materials for the reader.

Characteristics of an Effective Thesis

A thesis usually consists of two parts combined in a single sentence: your topic coupled with your position or point of view. Here are some examples that combine topic and position/point of view:

Subject	Thesis Statement
Driving under the influence	Anyone found guilty of drunk driving should have their licenses revoked for five years.
College internships	The college internship program has had positive consequences for participants.
Metropolitan bus system	Although Savannah’s bus system still has problems, it has become more reliable in the last two years.

Tone is established in the wording of your thesis, which should match the characteristics of your audience. For example, if you are a concerned citizen proposing a new law to the Chatham County Board about drunk driving, you would not want to write:

“It’s time to get the sleazy alkie off the street and from behind the wheel: I demand a mandatory five-year license suspension for every drunk who gets caught driving. Do unto them before they have a chance to do it unto us!”

However, if you’re speaking at a concerned citizen’s meeting and you’re trying to rally voter support, such emotional language could help motivate your audience.

Blueprinting should also be a concern when you write your thesis. An effective thesis suggests an outline of what a reader will encounter in the support paragraphs. Some examples:

Thesis Statement	Blueprint/Promise
Anyone found guilty of drunk driving should have their licenses revoked for five years.	Reasons why they should have their licenses revoked.
The college internship program has had positive consequences for participants.	Examples of positive consequences for participants.
Although Savannah’s bus system still has problems, it has become more reliable in the last two years.	Past problems contrasted with today’s successes.

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Three Potential Problems to Avoid

Because your thesis is the hub of your essay, it has to be as strong and effective as possible. Here are three common pitfalls to avoid.

1. Don't confuse an announcement with a thesis.

An announcement thesis usually occurs when the topic is stated without a clear point of view or position:

Announcement

My essay will discuss having a student pub on campus.

I am concerned about problems with cable television in Savannah.

The controversial subject of handgun legislation is my paper's topic.

Thesis Statement

For the good of the students, Armstrong should not allow a pub on its campus.

Cable television in Savannah is a failure that borders on consumer fraud.

Banning handguns in America is a first step toward controlling gun violence in our society.

2. Avoid a factual statement.

Without a strong position statement, it will be hard for you to develop your paper with a strong, consistent argument and evidence.

Factual Statement

Many businesses pollute the environment.

Movies today are violent.

America's population is aging.

Thesis Statement

Increased penalties should be levied against businesses that pollute.

Movies violence provides a safe and healthy outlet for aggression.

The aging of America's population will soon cause a crisis in health care services for all Americans.

3. Avoid broad statements.

Broad statements contain vague, general or sweeping terms that lack the focus your reader needs to know your essay's point.

Broad Statement

Nowadays, a high school education is often meaningless.

Cable news shows cater to the taste of the American public.

The computer revolution isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Thesis Statement

High school diplomas have been devalued by grade inflation and social advancement.

The success of Fox's news shows indicates that Americans want facts served up with entertainment.

Having a home computer doesn't automatically gain you entrance to the digital revolution.

Thesis Statement Exercises

1. Indicate whether each of these four possible thesis statements are:

- (AN) announcements
- (FS) factual statements
- (BS) broad statements
- (OK) effective thesis statements

Topic: *The ethics of treating severely disabled infants*

- a) Some babies born with severe disabilities have been allowed to live.
- b) There are serious issues involved in the treatment of newborns with disabilities.
- c) The government should pass legislation requiring medical treatment of newborns with disabilities.
- d) This essay will analyze the controversy surrounding the treatment of severely disabled babies who would die without medical care.

Topic: *Privacy and computerized records*

- a) Computers raise some significant questions for us all.
- b) Computerized records keep track of consumer spending habits, credit records, travel patterns, and other personal information.
- c) Computerized records have turned our private lives into public property sold to the highest bidders.
- d) In this paper, the relationship between computerized records and the right to privacy will be thoroughly discussed.

2. Below are four possible topics. Generate an effective thesis statement for each.

- Power struggles in the college classroom.
- Doctors' attitudes towards their patients.
- Television's depiction of the elderly.
- Minimum wage jobs for young people.

3. Below is a list of key points for an essay. Prepare a possible thesis statement for it.

1. We do not know how engineering new forms of life might affect the earth's delicate ecological balance.
2. Another danger of genetic research is its potential for unleashing new forms of disease.
3. Even beneficial attempts to eliminate human genetic defects could lead to the dangerous idea that only perfect individuals are acceptable.