



Douglas College

Douglas College Learning Centre

THE THESIS STATEMENT

College instructors expect to see a thesis statement in the introduction of most writing assignments. The thesis is a key sentence in your paper; it tells your reader about the paper's focus. Because thesis statements should be short and focused, they should usually only be one sentence long.

Before you start to write your paper, create a tentative thesis. This first thesis won't be perfect, but it is enough to focus your work. As your ideas evolve through your work on the paper, you should revisit the thesis and improve it.

Where do you put the thesis?

The thesis almost always comes as the final sentence of the first paragraph (the introduction).

The thesis idea usually appears again in the first sentence of the conclusion (**although in different words**). This reminds the reader of your point and allows the reader to evaluate how well you have developed and supported your point-of-view.

To see how the thesis works in the introduction and conclusion, see the Learning handout WR 4.30 The Essay.

Two Types of Thesis Statements

There are two general types of thesis statements:

- 1) the "Point-of-View" thesis, which presents an argument or case to be made.
- 2) the "Scope" thesis, which simply outlines the scope of the paper.

It is important for you to find out which type of thesis your instructor is looking for.

The "Point-of-view" Thesis

This type of thesis makes one main point which can also be described as the key insight you are explaining, the central argument you are putting forward, the case you are arguing, or the claim you are making. The purpose of your entire paper is to provide evidence and explanation that back up the thesis.

The point-of-view kind of thesis is required in many areas of the college, especially English, History, Political Science and Philosophy.

What characteristics should a “point-of-view” thesis have?***1) Suitable:**

The first and often most important part of developing a suitable thesis statement is to make sure your topic and thesis stem directly from the assignment instructions for the paper. Read your assignment instructions carefully, and make sure that your thesis is closely tied to what the teacher is asking you to do. Discussing assignment instructions with other students, with the instructor, and with a tutor can help you make sure your thesis is suitable. A second way to improve suitability of a thesis is to make sure it connects to key concepts you are learning in the course.

2) Specific/focused/limited:

The thesis needs to focus your paper on a specific piece, aspect, or side of a general topic. Ways to focus or limit a thesis include limiting the topic to one specific group of people (adolescents), to one time period (Trudeau’s second term in office), to one geographical location (the library at Hastings and Main), to one specific character (Hamlet), to only the problem or to only the solution. Any number of these limiting factors can be combined to make the thesis specific.

3) Feasible:

You need to be able to provide a well-developed set of support paragraphs for your thesis. This means that you need to have enough material to fully support the thesis you have chosen. If you are not able to find enough research, or you don’t have enough examples, reasons, expert opinions/quotations, facts, and explanations to fill up the size of the paper that you need to write, then you might have chosen the wrong topic. At the same time, if you have too much material for the size of the paper you were assigned, you need to further limit your thesis (see characteristic #2 above) so that the paper doesn’t turn into a book.

4) Insightful:

This means that you have a point to make that is worth making. Your main point or central idea should not be so obvious that most readers will already know what you are going to discuss or explain in the paper. Instructors do not want to read through points that are already common knowledge. They want to see that you have gained a more complex understanding of the topic than what people not in the course could come up with at a coffee break.

5) Significant:

Your thesis should be important to the audience that would normally read these kinds of papers (your instructor and maybe your classmates). In other words, it needs to be about what the audience will take seriously or care about. If your audience can say “So what?” or “Why does that matter to us?” you might not have a significant case to make.

* based in part on material from Eng. 130 coursepacks written by H. Eaton, B. Main, and S. Briggs.

The “Scope Thesis”

For some assignments, students are not expected to take a point of view. Instead, they are expected to answer a series of questions or give information about a topic. These types of assignments are most common in Nursing, CFCS and Business courses.

For these types of assignments, the thesis simply states what the paper is about. Sometimes it may even include a short list of sub-topics included in the paper. For example, “This paper explores the challenges faced by people with bipolar disorder and suggests strategies communities can take to assist them.”

Similar to the point-of-view thesis, the scope thesis should have the following characteristics:

- It should be short and clear.
- It should be suitable to the assignment instructions.
- It should identify a scope that is feasible considering the length of paper assigned.

What should you avoid when writing a thesis statement?

- 1) a question
Instructors do not want you to raise questions in your thesis; they want you to provide answers. Instructors especially do not want to see rhetorical questions (questions that either have no answer or have implied answers and are made only to argue a point, not to provide insightful analysis that leads to answers).
- 2) statements of fact that need no further support or proof
- 3) a detailed list of everything that you will try to include in the paper