

Writing a Thesis Statement

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Adapted from the Sheridan Baker Thesis Machine

Your thesis statement is the main argument of your paper, often placed in the introduction or the first few paragraphs of your paper. You may have learned in high school to always place it at the end of the introductory paragraph, which can be done as well. Your thesis should be clear, concise, and defensible, and it should be a response to an existing issue. It should not be an obvious statement that no one would refute. As a point of view in an existing conversation about the topic, it should be well backed up through examples and evidence from your arguments in coherent paragraphs. But the easiest way to give your audience a concise glimpse of these arguments in your thesis statement is by using a “because” clause.

The following steps are designed to help you get started in creating a basic thesis statement. After you have written it, try revising it at least twice for clarity and specificity as well as smoothness so it is not too abrupt or choppy. You may also find that you need to revise it if you change your positions after doing more research or as you develop more sophisticated arguments in writing the body of your paper.

Step 1: Identify the subject of your thesis.

Example: “Pets”

Step 2: Identify the issue, question, or problem you want to address with your thesis.

Example: “What is the best pet?”

Step 3: Decide on your claim or stance.

Example: “Cats make the best pets.”

Step 4: Qualify your claim for specificity and context. In other words, in what situations is your claim valid?

Example: “*Most* cats make *fine* pets.”

Example: “Cats make the best pets *for elderly shut-ins*.”

Step 5: Provide the basic reasoning for your claim that you will address in your paper by previewing it in your thesis with a “because” clause.

Example: “Most cats make fine pets because they are smart, clean, and independent.”

Example: “Cats make the best pets for elderly shut-ins because they are smart, clean, and independent.”

Based on these examples, your audience can expect the body paragraphs of your paper to expound on the issues of cats being smart, clean, and independent.

Step 6: Consider the naysayers.

There will always be people who disagree with you (on one point or more) just as you disagree with others; we respectfully call these people “naysayers.” It’s helpful to expect some of the counterarguments

to your thesis to speak to these naysayers' concerns directly when possible, especially in a written context in which there is not an immediate back-and-forth dialogue.

Example: "Although dogs can create peace of mind for the elderly by their friendliness and protection of property, cats can better serve this demographic by being aware of the surroundings enough to alarm elderly people of home intruders, maintaining a cleaner environment than dogs, and requiring very little overall upkeep."

It is up to you how specific you want to be in your arguments here. You can be somewhat more vague and then more specific as you develop your arguments with evidence and examples in your body paragraphs. Or, for the sake of clarity, especially in longer papers, it can be helpful to have key words that are repeated (though too not frequently).

Step 7: Revise for style and clarity.

Example: "Although the friendliness and vigilance of dogs can create peace of mind for the elderly, cats can better serve this demographic as they are aware of their surroundings enough to alarm elderly people of home intruders, maintain a cleaner environment than dogs, and require very little overall upkeep such as exercise or picking up after."

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