

## • Writing a Thesis Statement

Most college essays require a thesis statement. Many students are aware that their paper needs a thesis statement, but have no idea what a thesis statement really is or how to write one. Does this sound like you? Fear not! Below you will find:

- a definition of what a thesis statement is,
- examples of weak and solid thesis statements,
- some common thesis myths, and
- helpful tips for writing that nagging yet necessary bug in your essay.

### What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is a sentence or two that answers a complex, unique, or specific question that can be refuted by someone else. Thesis statements are the what, how, and “the because” of your paper; they may state reasoning behind your argument or contain evidence to support it. A good thesis statement sets up what you will argue or discuss in your paper and acts as a roadmap for your readers.

### What does a thesis statement look like?

So, how do you do all that in 1-2 sentences? Let’s look at some examples of good and not-so-good thesis statements, and see why they work (or don’t).

#### EXAMPLE 1

**Weaker Thesis Statement:** Reggae is the best music of the Americas.

**Reason:** While this sentence certainly makes a claim that can be refuted, it lacks support and is too general; *we do not know why the writer is arguing that Reggae music is the best.*

**Stronger Thesis Statement:** The popularity of Reggae is due to its fusion of many types of music and not due to its stereotypical association with Marijuana.

**Reason:** This is much more effective; it tells us why the writer believes Reggae music is so great. It also set up a map for what will come next: a reader can expect that the paper will explain the combinations of music types found in Reggae and why the combination works so well and then argue that this fusion plays a more important role than Reggae’s association with Marijuana.

#### EXAMPLE 2

**Weaker Thesis Statement:** Abraham Lincoln was an influential president.

**Reason:** Like our first example, this sentence makes a claim, but it stops short of telling us “because why.”

**Stronger Thesis Statement:** Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation was the most influential part of his presidency.

**Reason:** This statement is better because it focuses on what was most influential during Lincoln’s term of service; however, it doesn’t explain WHY or provide any evidence to support the claim.

**Even Stronger Thesis Statement:** The most influential part of Abraham Lincoln’s presidency was the Emancipation Proclamation. By establishing the abolition of slavery as a Union objective in the Civil War, the Proclamation did three important things: it committed the Union to a common goal, it helped the Union gain foreign support, and it provided the legal framework for the eventual freeing of 4 million African American slaves in the United States.

**Reason:** This student identifies the Emancipation Proclamation is the key factor in Lincoln’s influential presidency and then goes on to give three clear and specific reasons for WHY, all of which can be argued and supported. It offers a road map (outline) for the reader.

### **Tips for finding your thesis**

Pre-write! It doesn’t have to be a formal outline or concept map, but even free writing for a few minutes about what you think about the topic can help get you started.

Sometimes it helps to ask yourself what question(s) you’re trying to answer, or the phrase “In this paper I will...” (But be sure to edit the phrase out of the final draft!).

Write! And build in room for drafts. Sometimes, the thesis of your paper won’t come to you until you’ve written a draft. That’s okay; in fact, it’s awesome, but you have to be open to that process and allow yourself enough time to develop your argument.

Check the conclusion of your first draft—sometimes your original conclusion states the thesis statement best.

### **Thesis Myths**

- A thesis has to be in the first or last sentence of your first paragraph. Myth! (Unless, of course, your professor says otherwise). As a general rule, a thesis does appear in the first paragraph, but it doesn’t have to in order for your paper to be successful.
- A thesis has to be one sentence. Myth! It could be 1 or 2-3 sentences. It really depends on the length of the assignment; longer papers may need longer, more complex thesis statements, as in example #2 above.
- It starts with a specific word (“Although,” “There are...”). Myth! Your goal with your thesis is to outline your argument, if it helps to begin with a specific phrase, that’s great, but you don’t have to feel wedded to any either.