



Help With: Thesis Statements

A thesis statement is a concise statement of an essay's main focus or argument, and often indicates the main parts of the paper:

X is Y because of A, B, and C.

Usually located at the beginning or end of the introduction, the thesis aids the reader in following the flow of logic or information in the paper. This becomes increasingly important when papers are longer or deal with difficult subjects.

There are two common mistakes made in writing thesis statements:

- Being vague: "There are many reasons why university education should be free." Such as what? This doesn't tell the reader anything.
- 'Surprising' the reader. "I would like to talk about a problem that affects one in three people." In a speech the speaker often makes a dramatic buildup to the point in order to create suspense, but academic writing is not like this; the point of a thesis is to be totally direct, not to tease the reader.

One way to generate a thesis is to complete the sentence, "I want my reader to know that _____." The statement following "that" is the tentative thesis. In theory the reader ought to be able to read the thesis, stop reading, and still know what the paper is about.

Hints for Drafting a Thesis

1. State a clearly defined opinion on the topic. It is never a question.
 - No: Do you think that we should have to pay a state sales tax?
 - Yes: Citizens should not have to pay a state sales tax because of other sources of revenue the state can draw upon for its budget.
2. Lead to a discussion in the rest of the essay. Do not simply state a fact.
 - No: B.B. King is a well-known blues singer.
 - Yes: B.B. King's unique style and talent has enabled him to become the most well-known blues singer and guitarist in American history.
3. Limit the scope of the assignment. Remove irrelevant material.
 - No: The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee, the one that held the hearing that included Bill Gates and the owner of Dell Computers, Michael Dell, a very young man, has the difficult task of confirming federal judicial nominees.
 - Yes: The U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee can be very contentious, an attribute that often makes holding hearings and confirming federal judges difficult.
4. Make the statement in specific, clear terms. If you feel shy about being so direct, remember that it is the thesis that is being expressed, not you.
 - No: In my opinion, I truly believe and am fairly convinced that for the most part, students should not have to, at least not usually, buy parking stickers.
 - Yes: Because students already pay tuition and fees at their universities and colleges, they should not be required to purchase parking stickers.

5. Be direct, but this does not mean being confrontational or abusive.

No: Any idiot who thinks that guns should be banned deserves to be kicked out of the country.

Yes: While violence in America has increased in the past decade, further restrictions on gun ownership will not solve this problem.

Phrasing Your Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is not simply an indication of the paper's subject.

In this paper, I would like to discuss having a sales tax in Korea.

This is an introduction to a topic, but says nothing about the argumentative position or the specifics of what will be discussed.

Some people feel that Korea ought to have a sales tax, but the facts show it isn't a good idea.

This is still a vague and weak thesis. What facts? Why isn't it a good idea? This is the place in the essay to put your cards on the table and state your arguments clearly.

There are some good things and some bad things about having a sales tax in Korea.

This is slightly better but still says little. There are good and bad things about almost anything. We still don't know what those good or bad things are, or which side the writer is on.

Korea should not have a sales tax because it would increase bureaucracy, stifle consumer spending, and reduce foreign investment.

Finally—the point. This is good. We have a thesis statement which gives us three main ideas and tells the reader exactly what will be coming.

Korea should not have a sales tax because countries which implement sales taxes statistically lose revenue because of them.

This is fine too. Although the thesis statement has only one point, it is very specific in scope. What sort of arguments are going to follow are fairly predictable.

Although it is shown to raise revenues, Korea should not have a sales tax, because it increases bureaucracy, stifles consumer spending, and reduces foreign investment; because of these problems it would be better to have more efficient budgets as states which reform their tax codes have more immigration and new businesses.

The problem is that there are now five or six arguments, and the reader is likely to forget some or be confused about their categorization—are these six points equal, or are some sub-points of other points? This would be better summarized into a shorter list.

The “Legal” Thesis

Some writers put their thesis in their last paragraph, similar to the way lawyers place a conclusion at the end of their summation: “Therefore, we can conclude that the butler killed Mr. Fitzwilliam.” If you feel it fits your essay to try this approach, make sure the reader still has a clear idea where this train of logic is going at the beginning of your paper: “It is possible to discover who killed Mr. Fitzwilliam through the evidence.”