

# Thesis Statements<sup>1</sup>

## Why Should Your Essay Contain One?

1. To test your ideas by distilling them into a sentence or two
2. To better organize and develop your argument
3. To provide your reader with a “guide” to your argument



**In general, your thesis statement will accomplish these goals if you think of the thesis as the answer to the question your paper explores.**

## How Can You Write a Good Thesis Statement?

Almost all assignments, no matter how complicated, can be reduced to a single question. Your first step, then, is to distill the assignment into a specific question.

For example, if your assignment is “Write a report explaining the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class,” turn the request into a question like “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?” After you’ve chosen the question your essay will answer, compose one or two complete sentences answering that question. This is your thesis statement!

Even if your assignment doesn’t ask a specific question, your thesis statement still needs to answer a question about the issue you’d like to explore. In this situation, your job is to figure out what question you’d like to write about.

## **A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes:**

1. Takes on a subject on which reasonable people could disagree
2. Deals with a subject that can be adequately covered in the assignment
3. Expresses one main idea
4. Asserts your conclusions about a subject

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from: Indiana University “How to Write a Thesis Statement”

## **Let's see how to generate a thesis statement for a social policy paper.**

### **1. Brainstorm the topic.**

Let's say that your class focuses on the problems posed by the dietary habits of Americans. You find that you are interested in the amount of sugar Americans consume. You start out this way:

Sugar consumption

This fragment isn't a thesis statement. Instead, it simply indicates a general subject. Furthermore, your reader doesn't know what you want to say about sugar consumption.

### **2. Narrow the topic.**

Your research about the topic, however, leads you to the conclusion that elementary school children are consuming far more sugar than is healthy. So, you change your thesis to look like this:

Too much sugar consumed by elementary school children

Better! This fragment states your subject AND focuses on one segment of the population. Furthermore, it raises a subject on which reasonable people could disagree because, while most people would agree that children consume too much sugar, not everyone would agree on what should be done or who should do it. **Note that this fragment is still not a thesis statement because it doesn't tell your reader your conclusions on the topic.**

### **3. Take a position on the topic.**

After reflecting on the topic a little while longer, you decide that what you really want to say is that something should be done to reduce the amount of sugar these children consume. So, you revise your thesis statement to look like this:

More attention should be paid to the food and beverage choices available to elementary school children.

Almost there! This statement asserts your position, but the terms are vague.

### **4. Use specific language.**

You decide to explain what you mean about food and beverage choices, so you write:

Experts estimate that half of elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar.

This statement is specific, but it isn't a thesis. It merely reports a statistic instead of making an assertion.

### **5. Make an assertion based on clearly stated support.**

You finally revise your thesis statement one more time to look like this:

Because half of all American elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.

**Voila!** Notice how the thesis answers the question, "What should be done to reduce sugar consumption by children, and who should do it?" When you started thinking about the paper, you may not have had a specific question in mind, but as you became more involved in the topic, your ideas became more specific. Your thesis changed to reflect your new insights.