

Thesis Statements: Common Problems

A thesis statement is the heart of the essay. In reality, the quality of an essay comes down to the quality of the thesis statement. No amount of clear examples and good grammar can rescue a poorly thought out thesis statement. Here are some common pitfalls to avoid.

Redundant. Regardless of whether you are naming the points of your argument in the thesis or are only addressing them in your body paragraphs, you want to make sure that each point is distinct and doesn't repeat another point.

The decline in education in this country has been caused by the lack of adequate funding for schools, poor teacher training, and the inability of most school districts to raise enough money.

The first point and the third point here are basically the same. That means the essay is going to end up repeating itself. So cut one of the points or rewrite the third one to differentiate it more from the first.

Factual. A thesis statement has to be something arguable. In other words, it needs to be something that somebody could reasonably disagree with. Watch out for thesis statements that are unarguable.

In the early 1970s, California was in the top five in the nation for education. Now it is in the bottom five.

This is just a fact. There is nothing to argue here. What this needs is some kind of opinion or some kind of insight. For instance, the writer could try to look at *why* this change happened. Or maybe the writer could look at *how* this change has affected students in California.

Unrelated points. The goal of an essay is to present a unified argument that flows from one paragraph to the next. If the thesis tries to cover too many different things, the argument, and the essay itself, becomes fragmented.

Education prepares students to be critical thinkers and to engage with complex problems, and it also gets them high paying jobs.

The first and second points relate, but the third one feels out of place. This thesis statement will create a scattered essay instead of a unified one. So either get rid of the third point or state how it is related to the first two; perhaps it's an effect, for instance.

Broad. In an effort to have enough to write about, students often choose a really big thesis. Yet a big thesis can't be proven in a small essay. It's something that would take a longer article (or a book) to address properly.

Many creative suggestions have been made for how to fix the educational crisis in California.

This is just too big a topic to cover in a small essay. The writer needs a narrower focus. Maybe the writer could look at a specific aspect of the educational crisis. Or maybe the writer could focus on one or two suggestions that seem the most likely to be beneficial.

Vague. This, like being too broad, is a very common problem. Watch out for vague language. Readers can't read your mind, so be specific.

Most public school teachers are really bad.

What does the writer mean by "bad"? The reader may think bad means that the teachers don't challenge the students enough, but the reader may assume that bad means that the teachers assign too much homework. So it would be clearer if the writer mentioned what "bad" means. In general, attributes like good, bad, interesting, unique, etc. are open to interpretation and are therefore vague. Use specific language.