

Mullins

Thesis Statements

A *thesis* is an intellectual proposition. In other words, it is a unique idea that someone is trying to present or prove. A thesis is generally a writer's attitude or opinion about a given subject. A *thesis statement* is that idea described explicitly in one or more sentences. While a professional writer can use an *implied thesis*, a thesis that is not named, most college instructors will expect you to have a clear thesis statement in the introduction of your essay. A thesis is always composed of two parts. First, there's the topic that the thesis is about, and second there's the insight or opinion about that topic that the essay tries to argue. Think of it like an equation:

$$\text{thesis} = \text{topic} + \text{opinion/insight}$$

In college, you are usually writing in response to a prompt. The first thing you need to do is fully understand the purpose of the prompt. What topic are you being asked to write about? How are you being told to respond to that topic? What evidence are you allowed to use: are you writing about your own experience, something you've read in class, or both? Once you understand what the prompt is asking you to do, you can develop a thesis that directly addresses that purpose. Many essay prompts are in the forms of questions. The easiest way to start your essay is to make a thesis statement that directly answers the question. For instance:

prompt: Paulo Freire believes that most school systems make their students into passive drones, not into critical thinkers. Do you agree with him?

thesis statement: Because of my years in school, I agree wholeheartedly with Freire's idea that school makes us into passive drones, not critical thinkers.

The above example may seem a bit mechanical to you. But starting with a direct response to the question asked of you sets you on the right track. Keep in mind that in an out-of-class essay, you can always modify your thesis statement later if you need to. You can change both the style and the content if you wish. Because of this, the thesis that you use in the planning and drafting stages is often referred to as a *tentative thesis*. It's what you use to get you started, but that doesn't mean you're stuck with it if you come upon something better.

Point vs. Non-point thesis statements

Thesis statements generally come in two styles: point and non-point. A *point thesis statement* presents the topic and opinion, but also lays out the main points of the argument. These main points are explained in more depth in the body paragraphs.

For example: The lack of school funding has three negative effects on students: their books are old and outdated, their classrooms are in disrepair, and they get the idea that no-one cares about their education.

The point thesis statement is useful if you are having trouble being consistent in your essay. The points are used as the topic sentences of your body paragraphs and so your essay can be easily unified. Point thesis statements are also useful in in-class essays. When time is short, being clear in the beginning will help you stay on track throughout the essay.

While the point thesis statement is clear, it tends to be a bit mechanical and creates a lot of repetition in your essay. So most writers prefer a *non-point thesis statement*. It's the same as the example above, except the points are not listed. These are instead introduced as the topic sentences of the body paragraphs. The structure of the essay can be the same, you just don't call as much attention to it.