WRITING THESIS STATEMENTS

What is a thesis statement?
A thesis statement is a statement which presents the position you will argue for in your essay.

It is a key element of a well-argued academic essay and the first major signpost in your essay.

A good thesis statement
- is debatable, that is, it must be possible to present a case for and against the statement (but you argue for one side)
- limits the scope of your essay
- can be supported by the academic literature.

Good thesis statements are usually one sentence long.

In your essay, you will be expected to argue for one position. However, it’s a good idea to show that you are aware of any main counter positions.

A thesis statement is about taking a position. It means you do not sit on the fence.

Example
‘In Australia, everyone who finishes year 12 should go to university’ is a position.

“There are advantages and disadvantages to going to university” is sitting on the fence.

Where is the thesis statement placed?
The thesis statement is usually placed towards the end of your Introduction.

Tip
Don’t confuse your thesis statement with statements about the scope of your essay—your essay outline.

Example—thesis statement
A thesis statement clearly states your position e.g. Face-to-face lectures will be non-existent in Australian universities by 2020.

Essay scope or outline
The essay outline describes what issues/topics you will cover and/or what reasons you will give in the Body of your essay to convince the reader of your position.

Example
The following reasons could be given to argue that face-to-face lectures will be non-existent in Australian universities by 2020.

- Increasingly lecturers are putting their lectures on an LMS (learning management system).
- Fewer and fewer students are attending face-to-face lectures each year.
- Increasing numbers of students are enrolling in online university courses.
- Students like listening to lectures online and in their own time.

Note
Not all academic essays will be argumentative essays. Some essays may require you to describe something. In descriptive essays you may not be required to state your position.
Tip
Developing a thesis statement takes time so start with a provisional thesis statement. Having a provisional thesis statement will keep you focussed on your essay topic.

Remember
In the early stages of the essay writing process, you will probably want to alter the wording and maybe even the emphasis of your thesis statement.

Expect your thesis statement to evolve as you
• gain new insights
• find more pertinent evidence
• develop your understanding of the topic.

Keep your eye on the ball
Keep checking that your thesis statement corresponds with the question you are meant to be answering and that the evidence you are using in your argument substantiates your thesis statement.

If you don’t, you may find that you have a great thesis statement and argument but they are irrelevant to the essay question.

One way to keep checking is to ask yourself questions such as:
• “What is the main point I want to convince my reader of?”
• “Are the evidence and examples I’ve presented strong enough to convince the reader of my point?”

Thesis statement or not?
1. Wearing sunscreen is more harmful to human skin than getting sunburnt.

2. The chemicals in sunscreen damage the human skin and so does getting sunburnt.

Explanation: Statement 2 is not an effective thesis statement as it does not present a position, it is a “sitting on the fence” statement.

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