



Figure 1 Logos for the Academic Resource Center and The Writing Center

THESIS STATEMENT

The first paragraph in an essay is called the *introductory paragraph* and the first sentence of the introduction is called *attention getter*. It should attract the reader's attention and make them want to read the rest of the essay. The last sentence in an introduction is often the *thesis statement*. It states the main idea of the paper.

A *thesis statement* is the main idea or argument that will be developed in an essay. (It is like the topic sentence for the entire essay.) The thesis serves as a roadmap both for you and your reader. It helps keep you on track by reminding you of your argument while it lets your reader know what they can expect as they read the essay.



Figure 2 Drawing of cars in traffic

The thesis should consist of two parts – the topic and your opinion or analysis of it. It needs to state a strong opinion that a reader can disagree with. The entire essay will be based on your thesis statement, so it will need to state a position that you can support. It is usually one sentence in length and will most likely appear at the end of the introductory paragraph.

Examples:

1. For a number of reasons, students who have the time should consider volunteering to help out their neighbors in the community.

2. Peter the Great is by far the most impressive ruler in Russia's history because of his amazing transformation of his country from a backward nation into one that was on par with the great nations of Europe.

The thesis should cover only what you will discuss in the essay. It will most likely be necessary to narrow down your topic to fit the number of pages you were assigned to write.

Thesis with a broad topic:

American history is full of times of conflict.

Although this statement provides the reader with an opinion, it is far too broad. It would be extremely difficult to write a five-page essay on conflicts throughout American history. In order to narrow this down, it is best to focus solely on one specific time period in American history.

Narrowed down thesis statement:

Because of many changes occurring in American society at the time, the 1960s was a decade that is defined by change and conflict.

This narrows the topic down to America during one decade, but it is still a good idea to choose one aspect of that decade that you are most interested in discussing.

Further narrowed:

Whether it was the Civil Rights Movement demanding an end to racism, the women's movement demanding equality or the anti-war movement condemning the Vietnam War, America in the 1960s is a decade defined by protest.

In addition to narrowing your topic, it may also be necessary to expand the scope of your thesis. This will make it easier to organize your paper.

A basic thesis statement consists of the topic and an opinion:

Community colleges are an important part of California's educational system.

An expanded thesis statement expands on the idea stated in the basic thesis by adding because and listing reasons:

Community colleges are an important part of California's educational system because they provide students with a more cost-effective way of attaining a college degree, classes are smaller than at most four-year universities and they prepare students for the demands of college life.

By listing reasons, you also make the organization of your essay clearer, since each reason should provide the topic for a paragraph. For example, the first body paragraph in this essay will talk about how community colleges are cost-effective, the second will talk about the benefits of smaller class sizes and the last paragraph will discuss how they prepare students for the work load at a four-year university.

Using although can add ideas to an expanded thesis by including a contrast to your opinion:

Although many students want to go straight from high school to a four-year university, community colleges are an important part of California's educational system because they provide students with a more cost-effective way of attaining a college degree, classes are smaller than at most four-year universities and they prepare students for the demands of college life.

Do not expect that your final thesis formulation will always occur at the start of your writing process. A good idea is to develop a working thesis statement. A working thesis statement is one that can be amended, altered, or changed completely depending on what you discover during your writing process. As you go through the writing process, your understanding of the subject will deepen. As a result, you may find that your opinion changes or that you will be unable to support your original thesis statement. This is OK and to be expected. The main thing to remember is that each idea in the essay must relate directly to your thesis statement. Think of your thesis statement as the umbrella under which all the rest of your ideas and details in the paper rest.



Figure 3 Clip art of an Umbrella

Regardless of what type of essay you are writing, it is necessary to have an introduction with a thesis statement although they will look different. The following are sample introductory paragraphs. Underline the thesis statement.

1. ¹In the course of working my way through school, I have taken many jobs I would rather forget. ²I have spent nine hours a day lifting heavy automobile and truck batteries off the end of an assembly belt. ³I have risked the loss of eyes and fingers working a punch press in a textile factory. ⁴I have served as a ward aide in a mental hospital, helping care for brain-damaged men who would break into violent fits at unexpected moments. ⁵But none of these jobs were as dreadful as my job in an apple plant. ⁶The work was physically hard; the pay was poor; and most of all, the working conditions were dismal (Langan 237).
2. ¹ Tae kwon do is a Korean martial art. ² It is a way of fighting and self-defense based on an understanding of both body and mind. ³ As a college student, I discovered tae kwon do. ⁴ Even though I was physically fit and planned to become a police officer, I thought that women needed special skills to protect themselves. ⁵ Tae kwon do teaches these skills and much more. ⁶ The person who practices tae kwon do gains discipline, maturity, and a changed self-concept (Fawcett 53).
3. ⁴ That was the most boring and painful job I've ever had, but it motivated me to change my life (Fawcett 241).
4. ¹Most people believe that stress has a negative effect on their lives. ²Under severe stress, most cannot function effectively – or at all. ³Pressured by tight deadlines, heavy workloads, or competitive situations, they may suffer from such problems as anxiety, sleeplessness, or ulcers. ⁴Yet stress is not necessarily bad.

⁵Contrary to popular opinion, people can learn to turn stress into a valuable asset in the classroom and the workplace (Fawcett 291).

5. ¹Sixty-five is the traditional age for workers to retire in the United States.

²Conventional wisdom says that they have fulfilled their work obligations and should now leave job openings for those on the way up the career ladder, including young people just starting out. ³However, for many reasons, today's companies should look for ways to keep their older employees instead of forcing people to retire at age sixty-five (Fawcett 286).

For answers to these exercises, please consult with a Writing Center tutor

This handout is based on the following texts:

Fawcett, Susan and Alvin Sandberg. Evergreen with Readings: A Guide to Writing. 4th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992. 238-245 and 289-292.

Fawcett, Susan and Alvin Sandberg. Grassroots with Readings: The Writer's Workbook. 6th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. 52-57.

Hacker, Diana. A Pocket Style Manual. 3rd ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. 106-107.

Langan, John. English Skills. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1997. 235-236.

All of the above texts are available in Writing Center.

Please visit our website at www.lavc.edu/WCweb/index/html for additional resources and services.

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