

Thesis Statements



This handout offers basic principles for writing a thesis statement, but always tailor your work to your audience and assignment.

Definition

A thesis statement is the tool writers use to provide the audience with an idea of the purpose, scope, and organization of your paper, which is essential to most forms of writing. A thesis statement can vary depending on the assignment and audience, however, it typically

- provides the **purpose and main idea** of your writing.
- shows the **scope** of a piece of writing, the limits of what material your work will cover.
- indicates the **organization** of your writing by providing a preview and outline of what information will be covered in the body of your text. It helps readers understand what to look for as they read, and it can help keep you from digressing as you write.
- gives the writing **energy** and a sense of forward motion.

Making a Claim

A strong thesis combines **observations** with **perspective** to make a claim. As you collect your observations, ask yourself what factors might have caused the conditions of your observation or what implications your observation might lead to.

Observation: Julius Caesar was a tyrant.

Observation with perspective: Julius Caesar's experience in the military cultured his tyrannical behavior.

Providing Clarity & Precision

Vagueness and breadth leave readers feeling confused and disoriented. Choose clear, precise words when writing your thesis.

Example of broad and ineffective thesis: Julius Caesar had an important influence on history.

This concept of this thesis is obstructed by several **generic** words: *important*, *influence*, and *history*.

Important influence could refer to how Caesar became a dictator and brought about a civil war, but it could just as likely describe how he solidified the Roman Republic, laying the groundwork for Rome to rise as an empire.

Example of revised and narrowed thesis: Julius Caesar's aggressive leadership at the Battle of Alesia led to his establishment as a dictator.

A strong thesis statement employs **concrete** words, which reference **explicit** ideas. Words like *Julius Caesar*, *aggressive*, *establishment*, and *dictator* are specific enough keep your reader from getting confused.

If you find yourself struggling with a vague thesis, try thinking through these questions:

- Is any part of my thesis vague or unclear?
- Have I introduced purpose, scope, and organization of my work, including sub-topics?
- Have I used words that are precise, concrete, and helpful in establishing the paper's topic and tone?