

Writing Thesis Statements

Your thesis statement is the single most important argument in your paper. All of the other ideas in the paper are present in order to support the thesis statement. As a result, the thesis statement deserves a significant amount of time and energy throughout your writing process.

Here are three guiding principles to keep in mind as you work on your thesis:

1. Make sure your topic is clear

An important part of the writing process is taking a general topic (a novel you read in class, a time period in history, an important theory or movement in a field of study) and narrowing it down to the specific focus of the paper.

Your thesis statement must clearly define that narrowed focus to the reader.

Sample Thesis	Explanation
<i>Throughout the book, <u>one character</u> stands out as stronger than the rest.</i>	This topic is too vague. The writer hasn't identified the specific character.
<i><u>Atticus Finch</u> stands out as the strongest character in the novel.</i>	Now we know that the topic of the paper is Atticus Finch, one of the central characters.

2. Present a specific, defensible idea about that topic

This can be an evaluative analysis, an argumentative claim, or a detailed explanation and will be the guiding principle of your essay, requiring supporting details and analysis.

The more well-defined your idea is, the better your reader will be able to follow your thoughts, and the easier it will be for you to structure the rest of your paper.

<i>Atticus Finch <u>stands out as the strongest character</u> in the novel.</i>	The argument is too broad. It should clarify how he stands out, and in what way he is stronger.
<i>Atticus Finch <u>shows integrity</u> that makes him <u>stronger</u> than everyone else in Maycomb.</i>	The way that he stands out (showing integrity) is clearly indicated. However, it is still vague as to how that makes him strong.
<i>Atticus Finch <u>maintains his integrity</u>, making him the only adult in the novel to <u>actively fight against racism</u>.</i>	Now we have a clear indication of what makes him different (integrity) and how that affects him (lets him fight against racism).

3. Indicate the importance of your idea

Make sure that your reader will care enough about your concept that she will continue to read your essay. What new significance is added to your topic when we understand your idea?

Find the bigger picture that your idea reveals. Think of it as answering the question, “so what?”

<i>Atticus Finch maintains his integrity, making him the only adult in the novel to actively fight against racism.</i>	Yes, it has a clear idea, but it’s limited to the scope of the novel. It doesn’t tell us anything about why the novel and Atticus are important.
<i>By never wavering in his stand against racism despite the intolerance shown by the other adults in Maycomb, Atticus Finch teaches his children the value of integrity.</i>	Now the writer’s idea about Atticus has been expanded to a broader message, making the book, and the essay, significant to the reader.

Other Examples

Weak: Corporations should take better care of their employees.

Stronger: Walmart should provide a living wage to its employees.

Good: Unions are needed to give Walmart employees a better quality of life, including benefits and higher wages.

Weak: Humboldt is a great place to live.

Stronger: Humboldt has lots of diversity, which makes it an interesting place to live.

Good: Humboldt is diverse in its opportunities for social, recreational, and political involvement, making it a dynamic place to live.

Weak: Capstone projects are an important part of undergraduate education.

Stronger: Capstone projects are an indispensable culmination of an undergraduate career.

Good: By integrating personal and academic interests into a singular goal, capstone projects are an absolutely necessary culmination of an undergraduate career and send off into the world outside of college.

Weak: Colonization altered indigenous gender norms.

Stronger: Once colonized, the fluid gender roles held by the indigenous were replaced with binary ones.

Good: The Spaniards sanctioned Catholicism as a tool of social control. This introduced gender binarism, replacing indigenous fluid concepts of gender with binary ones.