


## Thesis statements in college essays

You may have a good idea of what a thesis statement is, but you may not be as sure of what’s expected in thesis statements in college-level writing.

### Thesis statement basics

<p><b>What is a thesis statement?</b></p>	<p>The thesis statement is the central feature of an essay; it is the key sentence that communicates the focus idea of the essay.</p>
<p><b>Where is a thesis statement placed?</b></p>	<p>Most effective thesis statements in academic writing are the last sentence of the introduction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no actual rule for <i>where</i> in the introduction the thesis statement must be placed*, <b>BUT readers expect the thesis to come after a more general introduction, so last sentence of the introduction will provide maximum clarity in your essay.</b></li> </ul> <p><i>*In some essay forms, e.g., Rogerian structure, the thesis may not even be in the introduction. This is a less commonly used form, however (but information about it is readily accessible and some instructors might teach or ask for it).</i></p>
<p><b>How does an effective thesis statement work?</b></p>	<p>The thesis statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>makes an assertion or claim</b> that articulates the essay’s central focus or message.</li> <li>• <b>ties to the essay’s topic sentences</b> that start each of the essay’s body paragraphs.</li> <li>• uses clear, straightforward language.</li> </ul> <p><i>Specific wording to make a particular thesis statement effective depends on what type of essay it is part of—be these basics apply in all cases.</i></p>
<p><b>What should a thesis statement NOT do?</b></p>	<p>An effective academic (college-level) thesis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• usually <b>SHOULD NOT</b> lay out or “list” the major subdivisions of a topic (<i>unless a particular discipline prefers it</i>).</li> <li>• <b>SHOULD NOT simply state a fact</b>; it should make an assertion that needs to be explained or developed.</li> <li>• <b>SHOULD NOT “announce”</b> the essay’s focus (e.g., “This essay will examine....”; “The purpose of this essay is to...”—<i>unless a discipline or assignment prefers it</i>).</li> </ul>

It's especially helpful to see examples of effective thesis statements, and possibly just as helpful to see examples of what should be avoided. Study these examples of thesis statements (good and bad!) in academic essays:

<p><b>Effective thesis statements!</b></p> 	<p>The recent rise of infectious epidemics can be traced to the development of “superbugs,” along with factors that are causing those “bugs” to spread easily.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Yes– this is an effective thesis for an expository (explaining) essay.</i></li> </ul> <p>The painting suggests that the closeness of family will ensure happiness even in the harshness of the wilderness.</p> <p>Bryon Haskin’s <i>War of the Worlds</i> portrays scientists, despite their flaws, as valuable and functioning members of society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>The two thesis statements above present claims of interpretive analysis—arguing how something works to create meaning—one for a painting, one for a film.</i></li> </ul> <p>Despite the many important reasons to be cautious about using social media, studies have shown benefits for some users.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>This thesis might be seen as expository or argumentative. The essay will explain the research to show the benefits mentioned; in so doing, it makes an argument counter to what is apparently more often presumed.</i></li> </ul> <p>The solution offered by CalTech’s team would work, but reliability and elegance make MIT’s idea the much better choice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>This thesis presents an effective argumentative claim.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Ineffective thesis statements—avoid these!</b></p>	<p>The major factors contributing to the recent increase in infectious epidemics are superbugs, people not washing their hands, and international travel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>This listing thesis is NOT effective; what about all these things will the essay discuss?</i></li> </ul> <p>I read both proposals and really liked MIT’s better than CalTech’s.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Unless the assignment asked for the writer’s process and opinion, this isn’t an effective thesis. Instead, it should make an assertion/claim: what did a comparison of the proposals reveal?</i></li> </ul> <p>The painting depicts a man cutting timber next to a small corral by a cozy log cabin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Oops—this is NOT a thesis; it’s a statement of fact. What will the essay discuss ABOUT this painting?</i></li> </ul> <p>The painting provides interesting ideas about content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o <i>Hmmmm....very weak thesis. What specific “interesting ideas” in the painting will the essay discuss?</i></li> </ul>