

Writing a Thesis Statement

Summary of video content

Some of these examples and materials are drawn from Dr. Stephanie Bell's workshop materials on Formulating Your Argument and Crafting Your Thesis.

In many academic courses, you're asked to write an argumentative essay that calls for a thesis statement. But what is a thesis statement and how do you come up with one?

First, look carefully at the assignment description. In first- and second-year courses, your professor often provides a question, a topic, or a choice of questions and topics for you to answer. Sometimes, you given a general question or topic and you have to make it more specific.

In third and fourth year courses, you're often asked to find your own topic and research question on an issue or topic that's clearly related to the course content.

In either case, you begin with a question. Sample questions might be:

How were Indigenous women portrayed in mainstream Canadian news media before and after the *Truth and Reconciliation Report*?

Why are boots important in *Waiting for Godot*?

What is the relationship between lack of sleep and willpower among gamers?

Critically compare how motherhood is represented in Author A and Author B.

What are the central causes of the Gulf War?

What is a thesis statement?

Your answer to that question

Your statement of a position that you will argue throughout the paper

Question: Why are boots important in *Waiting for Godot*?

Thesis: In *Waiting for Godot*, boots represent the discomfort of a life that's constantly chafing.

Significance/meaning: The message is that suffering is the meaning of life.

Question: Critically compare how motherhood is represented in Author A and Author B.

Thesis: Keats' depiction of motherhood in "poem" contrasts starkly with James' in "novel".

While Keats depicts motherhood as nostalgic mother earth type, James' third-wave depiction involves cyborg...

Significance: Both Keats's nostalgic mother and James' new age depiction of motherhood place the vision of motherhood firmly into a regressive box.

Where do you put a thesis statement?

Towards the end of your introduction

Introductions

Introduce the situation, issue, or context for readers

Then, include the thesis statement – your answer to the question; your argumentative stance

And finally, state the significance of your answer

Why do you include the thesis statement – the answer to your question – in the introduction?

Because in North America, you tell your reader what you're going to argue immediately. You give us the answer in the introduction.

You then show us the evidence and how you arrived at that answer in the body of your paper

You then tell us the answer again (in different words) in your conclusion and tell us why it's important in relation to the issue, piece of literature, or situation. In some fields, you may also be called upon to give recommendations for a solution to the issue, if one is called for.

How do you arrive at your answer to the question?

Write the body of the paper, using evidence in support of your analysis

You'll probably then arrive at an answer to the question – at the END of your analysis and paper

You then lift that answer from the end and turn it into a thesis statement, which you place in your introduction. (Leave it in your conclusion, too, in slightly different words.)

Statements of purpose, thesis statements, road maps

What's the difference?

A statement of purpose records what you intend to do. (Examples are from Dr. Bell's work)

For example:

In this essay I will investigate the central causes of the Gulf War.

There is no position given here; it's a declaration of what you're going to do. Words like "investigate" and "explore" indicate what you intend to do, but not how you intend to answer.

A road map gives readers directions about what they'll find in your paper, in what order:

In this paper, I explain the event that instigated the declaration of the Gulf War, I reveal that this spark was so catching by illuminating the animosity between the US and Iraq throughout the Cold War and over the Israel-Palestine question, and, finally, I point to political speeches and military strategies that are particularly revealing of the significance of this tense relationship for the cause of war.

It isn't a thesis statement, either.

Here's the thesis statement:

Thesis statement: While Iraq's invasion of Kuwait was pointed to as the central cause of the Gulf War by political leaders at the time, it is evident that America's animosity towards Iraq throughout the Cold War ultimately tipped the scale toward conflict.

This statement answers the original question about the causes of the Gulf War and states a position the student will argue by showing evidence in the body of the paper.

Look at the three together to tell the difference:

Dr. Bell also suggests ways of getting started if you're having difficulty.

If you're asked to draft a thesis statement before you write your paper and you're having trouble:

- Craft a specific question that you are seeking to answer in the paper
- Transform the question into a finish-the-sentence statement

What is the significance of boots in X book?

The significance of boots in X book is _____.

She also suggests:

Think

Work

Focus

Reflect

Talk to a friend

Use the writing centre

Procrastinate (for a bit)

Save drafts

Take notes

Shift to new modality (computer->paper)

Draw pictures & maps

Automatic writing

I would add to that:

Look at the evidence you've collected. What patterns do you see? What conclusions can you draw?

If you haven't gathered evidence yet, but you know the general area or question you want to focus on, then re-read, take some notes, and see what you come up with.

Re-read the piece of literature or the course readings or the data. What do you find that suggests a question if that's what you're searching for? What do you find that seems relevant?

Interesting? Worth exploring?