All About Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?
A thesis statement focuses your ideas into one or two sentences. Your thesis statement should tell your reader what the paper is about and also help guide your writing and keep your argument focused. It should present the topic of your paper and also make a comment about your position in relation to the topic.

What is not a thesis statement?
Thesis statements are not announcements: Instead, a thesis statement outlines the point of view that your paper will be taking.

Example:
- Announcement: This essay will argue that it should be compulsory that all high school students complete 200 hours of community service prior to graduating.
- Thesis: By making 200 hours of community service a compulsory component to graduating, high school students will contribute to their communities, develop strong work ethics, and gain work experience.

Thesis statements are not too broad: Sometimes an idea is just too big to cover in an essay. Try to avoid too broad of a topic when writing your thesis statement. This can make your paper too general and superficial.

Example:
- Too broad: Poverty in Canada can be solved.
- Thesis: While poverty in Canada is a complex problem, implementation of a guaranteed annual income should be part of a planned response because it would address issues of homelessness, poor nutrition, and dependency.

Thesis statements are not too narrow: A narrow thesis statement can limit the writer right from the beginning. Although a narrow thesis statement can appear to be specific and precise, it can be very difficult to support.

Example:
- Too narrow: There are three cures for the ‘bad day’ feeling.
- Thesis: Meditation, exercise, and humour are three techniques one can use to relieve that ‘bad day’ feeling.

Thesis statements are not facts: A fact is something that is accepted as true because it is based on verifiable evidence or shared experience. A thesis is a statement of opinion. It must be arguable. It
should prompt the reader or listener to ask ‘why?’.

Example:
- Fact: Apples detaching themselves from trees fall downwards.
- Thesis: People perform best when there is intense competition for limited rewards.

**Basic Thesis Statement Generator**
Generate a basic thesis statement with this activity.

To begin, keep this incomplete sentence in your head: “What I want to tell you is…”

Complete the sentence by adding an idea that clearly expresses a position, opinion, or viewpoint, but not a given or accepted fact.

Below are some examples of ideas:

1. Ice cream is the best dessert in the world.
2. Cats make the best house pets.

An example of a faulty thesis statement is “In Canada, summers tend to be really warm and winter really cold.”

Test your thesis by asking ‘why?’ If your ‘why’ question can be answered with ‘because’, you have a basic thesis statement. Not all ‘because statements’ make sense, as you’ll discover in these examples:

Let’s start with idea one, “Ice cream is the best dessert in the world.”

- Because ice cream comes in many flavours, can be served with fruit, and is refreshing in the summer. (This ‘because statement’ supports the thesis. Some writers actually include the answers to the ‘why?’ question as part of their thesis statement.)
- Because ice cream is high in sugar and calories, causes cavities, and upsets stomachs. (This ‘because statement’ does not support the thesis.)
- Because ice cream melts quickly, becomes sticky, and must be eaten right away. (This ‘because statement’ does not support the thesis.)

The second idea was “Cats make the best house pets.” Below are some ‘because statements’ to test with this idea:

- Because they make a mess, can become stinky, and make a lot of noise at night. (This ‘because statement’ does not support the thesis.)
- Because they are independent, caring, and clean. (This ‘because statement’ supports the thesis.)
- Because cat food and visits to the vet can become expensive. (This ‘because statement’ does not support the thesis.)

Using this format, you have given your reader a clear sense of where you are going, and have
communicated from the start that you have planned and organized your paragraph or paper.

**Quiz Yourself**
Take a moment and find out how well you can identify a thesis.

1. Which of the following are thesis statements that would have to be supported, and which are statements generally accepted as fact?
   a. Raising children in Canada is more demanding than in societies that are more traditional. (thesis statement)
   b. A thesis is only as strong as the explanations and evidence that follow it. (fact)
   c. Students who live in the Greater Toronto Area and who want or need to live at home have several choices when looking for a college. (fact)
   d. Looking at the records of its sports teams is one of the ways to predict which colleges are good. (thesis statement)
   e. The Maple Leafs are, overall, a better team than the Senators. (thesis statement)
   f. Plagiarism is preventable. (fact)