

Essays: Thesis Statements

The thesis statement explains your position on the topic of your paper. All writing at the university takes part in broader **debates** on specific topics, and your thesis statement is the way in which you share your views in relation to the existing literature in a given area. For this reason, when writing a thesis statement, your first priority is to make sure that your thesis is argumentative.

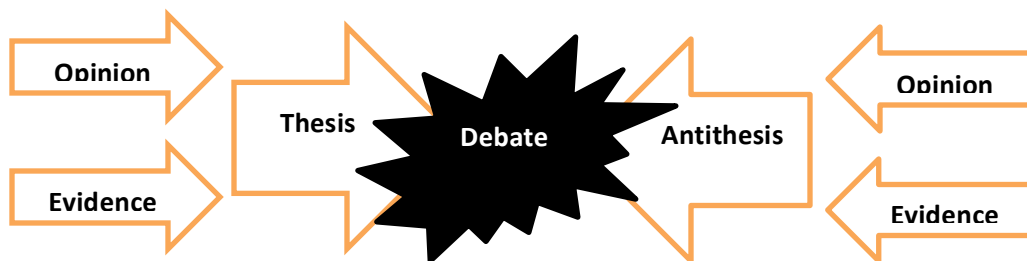
Argumentative – To be argumentative, a thesis statement must have one or more *counter-arguments* that disagree with it. Consider the example below:

In today's world, many television shows include scenes of explicit violence.

No one could provide a valid *counter-argument* to this statement because it is **inarguably** true that many TV shows have violent content. This statement is therefore more of an *observation* about violence on television. To make the statement more **debateable**, we can address the impact this violence may have:

This paper will discuss the effect that exposure to violent television has on the behaviour of young children.

With this statement, we are no longer simply making an *observation* about the topic because we are implying that there is a relationship between violent media and behaviour. However, no actual *opinion* on that relationship has been offered, so there can be no *counter-argument*. Your *opinion* and your *observations* of the relevant *evidence* combine to form your thesis statement:



Sometimes, the easiest way of expressing an *opinion* on the topic is to pick a side in the **debate**:

Children exposed to violent television exhibit more violent behaviour than children who are not exposed to such programs.

We finally have a statement that can be *counter-argued* because anyone could contend that violent television does NOT result in violent behaviour, and that person could then offer valid *evidence* to support this idea. **Note:** Other writers who disagree with your thesis statement should be able to offer facts and ideas that support their views. Remember that you are not trying to **prove** anything conclusively with your thesis statement, but rather to persuade your reader that your argument is valid by presenting convincing *evidence*.

In some cases, you may disagree with both sides in a particular **debate**, and so you are unable to pick a side. In this instance, your thesis statement should take a third, often unexplored, view of the topic:

Exposure to violent television does not, by itself, increase violent behaviour in young children who are not already predisposed to violence.

This statement rejects the **debate** between simple **YES** (violent TV encourages violent behaviour) and **NO** (violent TV does not encourage violent behaviour) and instead argues that both sides are only half-right in their contentions. It concedes that, yes, violent TV affects behaviour, but adds the condition that this is only true in those children who already act violently, whereas other children should not expect to be affected. While this statement is **debateable**, many university professors would demand that it be more analytical.

Analytical – To be analytical, a thesis statement must explain its rationale. Whenever a professor tells you that your argument needs to be more insightful or more ‘in depth’, you are being asked to show that you have thought about the *value of your evidence* and then give reasons why your thesis is **defendable**. This concept is often expressed as the ‘**So What?**’ question. Consider the example:

Children who are already predisposed to violent behaviour because of socioeconomic conditions in their home lives are more profoundly affected by exposure to violent television than are children with stable backgrounds.

This statement demonstrates the writer’s analysis of the **problem** (violent behaviour in children) and its **direct** (socioeconomic conditions at home) and **indirect** (exposure to violent television) causes. This paper would therefore need a lot of space to explore the connections between the different causes both in depth and in detail. In fact, a thesis statement this broad in its analysis might be too much for a five or even ten-page paper. In this case, a final priority is to ensure that your thesis is focused.

Focused – To be focused, a thesis statement must look at **only one** specific facet of a particular topic. Alternatively, if the topic is treated generally, then the thesis explores that topic using **only one or two** specific variables. Consider the example below:

Young boys in disadvantaged neighborhoods who are regularly exposed to violent crime dramas are more predisposed to violent behaviour as teenagers because of the appeal of fictional criminal archetypes like mobsters and gang members.

This thesis statement is argumentative and analytical, but it narrows the broad focus of the former examples by emphasizing ‘young boys’ instead of merely ‘children’, it locates these boys in a particular setting (disadvantaged neighborhoods), and further defines the type of ‘violent television’ as ‘crime dramas’. Lastly, it identifies some of the particular characters in crime dramas whom viewers like to emulate.

In developing your own thesis, try to follow this same progression:

Is it argumentative? >>>> Is it analytical? >>>> Is it focused?