



Illinois Valley Community College  
Writing Center

## WRITING A THESIS

A thesis statement identifies the main idea of your essay. The rest of the essay will be organized around supporting your thesis statement. Thesis statements are usually placed in the introduction to the essay, **often appearing as the last sentence in the introductory paragraph.**

As you begin to draft your essay, it is a good idea to work with a *tentative thesis statement*. This statement will help focus your ideas, but may change as you research your topic and write your drafts. Review your tentative thesis statement and revise it accordingly as you work.

Writers often find it helpful to draft their topic sentences before finalizing their thesis statement. Since your thesis statement should **preview all your main ideas**, look at each topic sentence to identify its main idea. Then, combine each of those main ideas in your thesis statement. However, avoid simply listing your ideas; instead, strive to show their relationship (the “big picture” of the essay).

When writing about literature, name the author and title of the work in the thesis statement. Properly format titles (see our related handout).

### Characteristics of effective thesis statements:

#### 1. **Effective thesis statements clearly state the essay’s main idea.**

Beyond simply stating your topic, your thesis statement should state what you will say about your topic. For example:

- Although the stories “Night Shift” and “The Clarion Call” both use descriptive language, King and O’Henry differ greatly in the effect their language has on the reader.

Here, we see that the topic is two stories, but also know that the writer will focus on how the language affects the readers. The authors and titles of the stories being discussed are also named.

#### 2. **Effective thesis statements communicate your essay’s purpose.**

Depending on the assignment, your essay will likely have a specific purpose. For instance, some essays are informative while others are persuasive. Your thesis statement should convey your purpose to the reader. For example:

- In order to prevent violence in schools, conflict resolution should be a mandatory class for all high school students.

Here, it is clear to the readers that this essay will attempt to convince them of a certain point of view.

#### 3. **Effective thesis statements are clearly worded.**

Use specific wording in your thesis statement; avoid vague language, irrelevant details, and confusing terminology when introducing your essay’s main point. The thesis statement should give an accurate preview of what you will discuss and indicate the essay’s direction and scope. In this way, your essay and thesis statement will share a sharp focus.

- While enacted with good intentions, immigration laws often create more problems than they solve.

Here, the clear wording signals what will be discussed and highlights the focus of the essay.

## What to avoid when writing a thesis statement:

### **1. Announcements of intent:**

Statements like “I will discuss...” or “The thesis of this essay is...” are stylistically distracting and informal in tone. Sometimes this is called a “purpose statement.”

### **2. Statements of fact:**

Simply stating a fact is a dead end that cannot be developed into an essay. For example, “Hybrid cars get better gas mileage than cars with standard gasoline engines” is a fact that has already been established and leaves the writer nowhere to go.

### **3. Thesis statement as the title:**

Titles are not detailed enough to properly preview your essay and communicate its purpose.

## **Examples of effective thesis statements:**

- As research proves second-hand smoke poses danger to school-age children, smoking should be banned with 1000 feet of a school. *This statement clearly states the main idea of the essay.*
- Students should be required to take a course on time management skills before graduating high school. *This statement clearly conveys the essay’s persuasive purpose.*
- Because community colleges have quality instructors, financial savings, and career-oriented classes, they are a better choice than a large university for many students. *This statement clearly and concisely previews the main points of the essay.*

## **Examples of ineffective thesis statements:**

- Smoking is hazardous to your health. *This statement simply states a fact; it cannot be developed into an effective essay.*
- This paper will discuss the consequences of poor time management for college students. *The announcement of intent in this statement has an informal tone and distracts the reader.*
- When it comes to considering what type of institution to attend, it is beneficial to consider that community colleges have many positive attributes; these include (but are not limited to) instructors who are dedicated to their fields, financial savings to the student, and classes which are focused on careers. *This statement has overly complex wording.*