

THE THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement is the key to a paper. Before you begin an essay, you must know what you are writing about (the topic) and what you think about it (the thesis statement). A thesis statement is an opinion you have formed or a judgment you have made based on your experience or reading. It is also your controlling idea. The information in your essay must fit the thesis perfectly, like a key fits a keyhole. Use the following reminders to check yourself:

- Am I able to support my thesis statement?

A thesis should fit the knowledge you have or can obtain. Be sure that the material necessary to prove your statement or justify your opinion is available to you. You should have an idea of what you can and cannot back up from your research. If not, you may need to go back to the library or your computer and look for more evidence.

- Is my thesis statement a fact or an argument?

Make sure you are actually taking a side with your thesis statement and not just simply stating a known fact. For example, the statement *Racism in America today is a problem* is not much of an argument. A more effective thesis statement would be *Racism in America is less / more of a problem today than in the past, because of...* Remember, the thesis statement should lead to a discussion.

- Is my thesis statement specific enough?

The thesis statement narrows the focus of your paper to a specific issue concerning your topic. You must think of a statement that restricts the discussion to just one or two related areas. If you have a very large topic, such as politics, the thesis statement would need to be very specific, or else the length of the paper and research necessary would become prohibitive.

- Does my thesis statement answer the reader's mental questions of "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why."

It should be clear from your thesis statement exactly what issue you are addressing, what you think about that issue, and why it is important. The thesis statement is the starting point for the discussion (the body of your paper), and it is important that the reader is not lost at the beginning. If it is a complex topic, some explanation might be required. Your introduction is a good place to include background information. How much you include depends on your audience and its knowledge of your topic.