



FORMULATING THESIS STATEMENTS

THESIS STATEMENTS

TOPIC IDEAS

Before you formulate a thesis statement, you'll need to start with an idea. Most of the time, you'll be given a topic to write about. Other times, you'll need to come up with your own idea, which can be the most challenging part of the research process. You can find ideas for topics in a number of places. Here's a list to help you get started:

- **Textbooks** - Great for an overview of topics. If you are taking an interesting course, look in your textbook for topic ideas, or ask your professor.
- **Reference books** - Browse the reference area and look for encyclopedias or other reference sources that will give you background on a variety of topics. Also a good way to identify specific areas of the subject you might be interested in pursuing.
- **Magazines and newspapers** - Periodicals are good sources for exploring current events issues.
- **Journals** - These are best for exploring more scholarly topics. Ask a librarian for recommendations.
- **General or subject specific article database** - Great if you already have a topic in mind. *Academic Search Premier* is a good general database to start with if you aren't sure where to look.
- **CQ Researcher** - For argumentative papers. Presents both sides of the story for controversial topics.
- **Google** - Use *Google* to help you narrow down a topic if you already have a general idea of what you want to research.

FOCUSING THE TOPIC/FORMULATING A THESIS STATEMENT

After you come up with an idea, you need to decide on what aspects of that idea you will emphasize. You can focus a topic by geography (Utah schools), a specific population (elementary school students), or to a particular time period (civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s). You don't have to focus your topic in all these ways; these are just some possibilities.

Why is it important to focus a topic? If it's too broad, you'll be overwhelmed. For example, searching for sources on "education" would bring up an enormous amount of information, but focusing your search on "how school vouchers will hurt already economically strapped public schools" will provide a more manageable set of results. On the other hand, it is important that your topic is not too narrow, as you will have a hard time finding enough information (or the required type of information), and not have enough issues to develop effectively. In this situation, your paper may lack context and depth.

A thesis statement is a research proposition which is to be proven or argued. The argument(s) you make in your paper should reflect the main idea, and the sentence that captures your position on this main idea is the thesis statement. This statement only needs to be one or two sentences.

Following are examples of both good and problematic thesis statements:

PROBLEM: Thesis is a simple opinion statement. Writer's position is clear, but no actual argument is present.

The behaviorist style works better than the constructivist approach.

Mark Twain is the best writer that has ever lived.

SOLUTION: Reword so that there is a clear argument.

After a time of fervent dedication to behaviorist pedagogy by teachers and administrators, elementary school education has begun to emphasize constructivist approaches; however, there is little evidence to attest to the efficacy of this method.

Mark Twain's success as a writer lies in his use of humor to critique American life.

PROBLEM: Thesis is too broad or vague.

People need to stay healthy.

Who are we talking about? What kinds of programs would help people to stay healthy? Exercise programs? Dietary changes? Individuals require different exercise programs and eating habits to be healthy. A program for an Olympic athlete would be totally different than an elderly woman or an elementary aged child.

More attention should be paid to the food choices available to school children.

This thesis asserts your position on the issue, but the term ‘more attention’ and ‘food choices’ are somewhat vague and could be more descriptive.

SOLUTION: Reword so that thesis is more focused and defined.

Due to the prevalence of childhood obesity in the United States, elementary school lunch programs should look into sustainable farming to support children’s daily requirements of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Here the focus is on elementary aged children and school lunch programs who use sustainable farming as a way to provide healthy meal choices to children.

Because half of all American school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.

This thesis is very specific and addresses what should be done about excessive sugar consumption as well as who should address it. This also addresses beverage machines in particular, rather than the vague phrase ‘food choices’.

PROBLEM: Thesis is simple statement of fact. There is no argument or proposed solution.

Experts estimate that half of elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar.

Pollution is bad for the environment.

SOLUTION: Reword so that argument is clear.

American elementary school children consume too much sugar; therefore, schools should improve the quality of meals they serve.

America’s anti-pollution efforts should focus on privately owned cars because it would allow most citizens to contribute to national efforts and care about the outcome.