An effective thesis statement presents the main idea of an essay or research paper. Located in the introductory paragraph, the thesis states the main point of the essay. In addition to keeping you on target while you write, your thesis statement tells your readers how you intend to approach your topic. Throughout the paper, your thesis promises your readers that you will prove specific facts or develop certain ideas; therefore, every paragraph, sentence, and word in your paper must relate to this controlling idea. Think of your paper as a human body, and your thesis statement as the spinal cord. Without it, there is no structure.

The thesis statement in a five-paragraph paper usually has three main subtopics.

An example of a thesis statement with three subtopics is:

Regularly visiting the new Writing Center at UNT Dallas will help you become the best writer on the planet because it offers superhero tutors, current technology, and fantastic handouts.

The main topic explores the idea that regularly visiting the writing center will help you become the best writer on the planet, and the subtopics further expand this opinion with three distinct examples: 1) tutors; 2) technology 3) the handouts.

For you as a writer, the thesis statement:

- Develops through the interrelationship of thinking, reading, and writing;
- Limits your research by providing you with one controlling main idea that intrigues you;
- Narrows your writing to one specific claim that you can develop or prove;
- Organizes your ideas so you know the important points you want to make in your paper; and
- Clarifies your writing by keeping you on target to fulfill your proposed purpose

For your readers, the thesis statement:

- Identifies the main point and sub-points of your essay clearly and quickly;
Functions as a road map so your readers can easily follow your ideas; and
Gives satisfaction at the conclusion of the paper when your readers discover you have fulfilled your promise by proving or developing your main point.

Characteristics of an Effective Thesis Statement:

1. An effective thesis statement prepares readers for facts and details, but it cannot itself be a fact. It must always be an inference that demands proof or further development.

   Too Factual: The UNT Dallas campus has two buildings.

2. A good thesis should narrow, and not too broad.

   Too Broad: College students have a lot of responsibilities.

3. A strong thesis statement should be sharply focused and not too vague.

   Too Vague: Students are affected by problems with families, teachers, and the media.

If you can write an effective thesis statement for a five-paragraph essay, you can use the exact same formula to write a five page paper, a twenty-five page paper, or even an entire book!

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