A thesis statement establishes the writer’s purpose and point of view in argumentative or persuasive writing. It stakes the writer’s position concisely, sometimes in a single sentence, and often at the end of the first paragraph. By making a clear thesis statement, writers focus the reader’s attention before leading them step-by-step through their analysis and evidence for the argument.

In a finished paper, thesis statements come at the beginning, but that doesn’t mean that the writer begins with one and proceeds in a linear way from there. Arguments take time to develop and refine; start with a sense of purpose, then let the process of researching and writing help you fine-tune your point of view. Along the way, keep in mind the following qualities of a strong thesis:

Your thesis must be **debatable**, which is to say that someone could reasonably argue against it. A statement of basic facts or universally shared beliefs is not a thesis. You must stake a claim. For example:

**No, this is NOT a thesis statement:** “There is much controversy around the rebuilding of the World Trade Center site. Some people support the current plan to rebuild corporate towers, while others suggest that a non-commercial use for the Manhattan site might be more appropriate. Some critics go as far as to suggest that the plot should be left empty so as to memorialize the losses of September 11.”

*Why is this not a thesis statement? The writer summarizes others’ various opinions on rebuilding, but does not make a claim of his/her own telling us how the site should be used.*

**Yes, this IS a thesis statement:** “Although developers are planning on rebuilding the World Trade Center site as a block of corporate towers, non-commercial use would better serve the memory of 9/11 victims and provide much needed public space in an otherwise privatized section of Manhattan.”

*This IS a thesis statement because the writer takes a position: the World Trade Center site would be best served by non-commercial use.*

Your thesis must also be arguable in a practical sense. Do you have solid **evidence** to make your point **convincing** to the reader?

A **narrow** thesis is generally stronger than a general one. For example, you might argue that the “federal government should increase art funding even in hard economic times” rather than “art is essential to society” (an idea that also suffers from not being debatable). If you cast your net too wide, it’s unlikely you’ll be able to defend the argument sufficiently in the scope of a paper.

A thesis should ideally be **original**, providing a point of view that expresses your analysis and perspective. This is not to say that in your research you won’t find similar points of view (in fact that’s a goal of your research), but rather that you will narrow or otherwise distinguish your argument from those of others enough to make a fresh observation on your topic.

What is the **significance** of your thesis statement? The reader should care about your point of view, finding it compelling and valuable to think about in regard to the subject at hand and perhaps also in a broader context.