

## Composing a Thesis Statement

### UWF Writing Lab

A thesis statement is a clear, concise sentence stating the main idea to be developed in the essay.

Example: Capital punishment is a remnant of times when men were uncivilized.

This statement clearly states the writer's attitude toward the subject of the theme he is writing.

Points to remember:

1. A thesis statement cannot be a fragment; it must be a sentence.
2. A thesis statement should not be a question. Once you ask a question, you have to answer it before you will have an idea.
3. A thesis statement should not contain phrases such as "I think." If you make the statement, you obviously think it.
4. A thesis statement should not be a blanket statement. You must allow for exceptions. The more specifically you state the main idea, the easier it will be to develop it into an essay.
5. A thesis statement should not contain elements that are not clearly related. Example: Capital punishment is a remnant of times when men were uncivilized; the warden at Raiford is the governor's brother.
6. A thesis statement should not be expressed in vague language. Choose each word carefully to make your meaning as specific as possible.
7. A thesis statement should not be too narrow. Unless you express your attitude, the statement about the subject has no significance for a reader.
8. A thesis statement should not contain obscure or garbled language.  
Example: When one thinks about capital punishment, the subconscious is on a different level.  
The sentence as it stands is meaningless. Not only are the relationships among "capital punishment," "subconscious" and "different level" muddied, but also the meaning of the words "the subconscious is on a different level" is completely obscure.

The next step in planning your paper is to formulate topic sentences that state the second-level main ideas which you will develop into paragraphs supporting your thesis statement.

The topic sentence states the main idea of the paragraph. Although the sentence may appear anywhere in the paragraph, it usually appears either first or last. Frequently it is the first sentence in the paragraph. No matter where you place the topic sentence, however, it determines what will be included in the paragraph. The topic sentence is to the paragraph what the thesis statement is to the essay.

One way to compose topic sentences is to ask questions about the thesis statement. The most useful questions to ask are WHY? and HOW?

Examples:

1. Thesis Statement: Everyone should have a room in which he can be alone.

Question: Why should everyone have such a room?

Write the answers as they come to you. Your answers may be topic sentences for your paragraphs. Here are some possibilities:

Topic Sentences: Solitude is conducive to resolving personal problems. Most people study more efficiently in private than with others around. Occasionally everyone needs to escape from the stress of being with others.

2. Thesis Statement: Children should begin training for independence at an early age.

Question: Why should they?

Topic Sentences: They learn how to handle money.  
They develop their own personalities instead of mirroring parents.

3. Thesis Statement: Fishermen and hunters often destroy the natural resources that they rely upon for their sport.

Question: How do they?

Topic Sentences: Fishermen and hunters sometimes dispose of their garbage and tin cans in rivers and lakes.  
Through carelessness, they cause forest fires.  
Irresponsible sportsmen try to outsmart the fish and game wardens in any way they can.

If your questions result in more topic sentences than you need for your essay, select those which strongly support your thesis statement most effectively.

Question: In what way do they learn to make decisions?

Answer: If, when shopping for food the first few times, they buy only exotic items, they soon discover that there are no eggs for breakfast and no milk to drink during the day. The next time, they will buy essentials first.

Question: Can you think of any EXAMPLES FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE?

Answer: All the helpful answers above are based on personal experience.

Question: Can you think of any EXAMPLES FROM YOUR READING?

Answer: One of the most famous examples of someone who was forced to make decisions for himself, and thereby survived is the hero of Robinson Crusoe.

These are just a few of the answers that could be given. As you go through the questioning process, write down the helpful answers in complete sentences. Once you have written down your answers, you will have, at the very least, a skeleton paragraph. Now check the sentences carefully to be certain that they are related to both the topic sentence and the thesis statement. Rearrange them, if necessary, into more logical order.