

**definition:** a thesis is a concise sentence which states the purpose and content of an essay. It is generally a direct response or answer to the prompt or question given for an essay, and it is generally found at the end of the introduction.

**1. The thesis controls the paper.**

It demonstrates what your paper will talk about and does not allow the essay to be too broad. If your essay is about penguins, the thesis will define what you plan to say about them: that they eat fish, or that they are popular birds. Whatever appears in your thesis will be in your essay: nothing else.

**2. A thesis should be assertive, not just describe something.**

Usually, a thesis explains how or why, not who or what. I cannot support these theses:

- The Cosby Show was a popular show in the late 1980s.
- Professional wrestling has been popular for decades.

They are too factual; the only way to support those statements is by quoting statistics which can be done in a sentence or two, not in an entire essay. However, the following theses are supportable:

- The Cosby Show was a popular show in the late 1980s because it reflected the values of the time. (explains why)
- Professional wrestling remains popular by changing with the times. (explains how)

**3. A thesis should be narrow, but not too narrow.**

Keep the assignment and the page length requirements in mind. You want to cover the assignment without filling the paper with unnecessary information. Consider the assignment to write 3-5 pages about your elementary school years. Which thesis is best?

- Elementary school was hard for me.
- I hated the meatloaf in the cafeteria because it tasted funny.
- I lived in constant fear of being embarrassed by the other kids, the teacher and myself.

**4. The thesis indicates organization.**

The order of the items in your thesis should be the order they appear in your paper. Here is an example of a thesis statement that helps structure the paper:

Although some would find the extreme weather unbearable, I enjoy the rural setting and friendly people of my Kansas hometown.

The rest of the paper should follow the order outlined in the thesis:

- a) unbearable weather
- b) two enjoyable points
  - i) rural setting
  - ii) friendly people