

Thesis Statements



Thesis statements are the **central claim of your argument** or paper. It is important to understand the difference between a topic and a thesis statement. A **topic is a general** (often broad) subject or idea you want to discuss or explore. A **thesis statement is a specific argument** you will be making about a specific subject.

The death penalty is a **topic**. A **thesis statement** on this topic could be this: The use of the death penalty as punishment for minor defendants is wrong because it violates the 'cruel and unusual punishment' clause of the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution.

It may help to think of a thesis statement as a **guide to your paper** for the reader. A solid thesis statement states your point of view and sets up your argument in a **concise, specific, and interesting** way. It also **directly answers the question in the assignment** and you can always develop a counter argument against it.

Writing a Thesis Statement

Step 1: Make sure you understand the assignment. For instance, a thesis statement about a close reading of a text may be very different from a thesis statement for a research paper.

- Close reading example: "The father/son dynamic Ulysses sets up in lines 33-43 of Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses" is crucial to understanding the poem as a whole because Ulysses inadvertently gives the reader an idea of his priorities in life by describing his son's life in contrast to his own."
- Research example: Widespread poverty in third world countries affects the future of these countries because children growing up in poverty are often permanently disadvantaged as result of hunger, malnutrition, lack of access to safe water, poor health, and the lack of educational and other resources.

Step 2: Ask yourself some questions to start the brainstorming process.

- What do you think about the topic?
- What opinions or arguments do you have about the topic?
- How can you support your ideas and arguments?

You may write something like "The death penalty is sometimes used as punishment in cases involving minor defendants."

This statement could be used as a starting point, but it essentially just restates the assignment. It does not include your opinion or argument.

Step 3: Construct a sentence about your opinion on the topic. You can start by writing a sentence using the model "I think that_____."

Fill in the blank with the opinion you formed during the brainstorming process. Let's assume that, after completing all your research, you come to the conclusion that the use of the death penalty as punishment for minors is wrong. Now you have a rough idea of your opinion and what you want to argue.

Step 4: The next step is to express the *why* behind your opinion using the following model:

"I think that the use of the death penalty as punishment for minor defendants is wrong because _____."

Fill in the blank with why you think the death penalty should not be used in cases involving minors.

Your sentence may read something like "I think the use of the death penalty as punishment for minor defendants is wrong because it violates the "cruel and unusual punishment" clause of the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution."

Step 5: Refine your thesis. Get rid of the "you" in your thesis statement to make it sound more academic and less like a personal opinion. You want to boil down your thesis statement down to your central claim to make it as concise as possible. To do this, all you have to do is remove the "I think" from your sentence:

"The use of the death penalty as punishment for minor defendants is wrong because it violates the "cruel and unusual punishment" clause of the Eighth Amendment of the US Constitution."

Congratulations! You now have all the tools you need to write a great thesis statement!