

Developing a Thesis Statement

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When you write a paper, the **thesis statement** of your paper is the *main idea* (or proposition) you mean to convey, the *central point* or *claim* your essay supports and develops. An effective thesis statement clearly communicates your essay's direction, emphasis, and scope. It tells your readers not only what your essay's topic is, but also how you will approach that topic and what you have to say about it. An effective thesis, then, is more than a simple statement of your topic, statement of fact, or statement of your intent. Consider the following example:

- Topic: Open college admissions programs.
- Statement of fact: Some experts question the effectiveness of open college admissions programs.
- Statement of intent: This essay will discuss the effectiveness of open college admissions programs.
- Thesis: Although some experts may question the effectiveness of open college admissions programs, the success of SLU's program can be measured in two ways: by the documented effectiveness of our school's basic instruction in writing and reading and by the positive influences our open admissions students have had on the education of SLU's more traditional student population.

The preceding examples are *templates* or models you might use to organize your thesis statements:

- 1.) An analysis of X proves Y because of Z . (where Z = the main points of your essay)
- 2.) Although X , Y because Z (where Z = points 1 , 2 , and 3).

Note also that this formula suggests a method of development for the body of your essay. When all else is equal, organize the body of your essay so that the sequence of sections and paragraphs matches the sequence of the parts of your thesis statement.

Following are some characteristics of effective thesis statements that follow this basic pattern. Compare the faulty sample theses to the more effective thesis statement above.

1. An effective thesis has *definite content*. Avoid the "weaseling" thesis that doesn't really say anything; take a position.
Not: Although some people support open admissions programs, others do not.
2. An effective thesis is *focused*; it has a *limited scope*.
Not: Open admissions programs are a complete failure everywhere.
3. An effective thesis often suggests the kinds of *evidence* and *reasoning* that will be used to support your claims.
Not: The success of SLU's open admissions program is obvious.
4. An effective thesis often recognizes *opposing viewpoints*, sometimes in the form of an introductory "Although. . ." clause, thus giving an air of balance and careful deliberation to your writing.
5. An effective thesis provides a *preview* of the main points and organization of your essay; it allows your reader to anticipate where you're heading.

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