

Writing Thesis and Topic Sentences.

Remember: A thesis controls an essay. A topic sentence controls a paragraph. I will use thesis below, but the rules apply to both. Both the thesis and topic sentences are important because they: 1) Tell what the essay (or paragraph) will be about and 2) Gives the reader a sense of direction.

Four types of thesis sentences:

1. Simple thesis = Topic + Attitude/Opinion

To write a simple thesis, put the topic of the essay in the subject of the sentence. Put the attitude or opinion in the predicate (the verb and all its modifiers and complements).

Example: Our next president should seek a solution to affordable health care for all Americans.

Subject = Our next president = topic

Predicate = should seek a solution to affordable health care for all Americans = opinion

2. Thesis with key terms = Topic + Attitude/Opinion + 3 key points/topics of development

This thesis forms a mini-outline of the essay. This type works effectively with longer research papers or reports as well.

To write this thesis, begin the same as with the simple thesis. Using parallel sentence structure, add the three topics you intend to discuss in the body paragraphs. These topics must be listed in the same order in the thesis as they are presented in the body paragraphs.

[Topic #1 #2 #3]

Example: A successful soccer player possesses skills, endurance, and intelligence.

Example: To solve America's energy problems, the government must outline effective steps to natural gas deregulation, increase research funds for alternative energy sources, and educate the American public as to efficient energy use.

3. Power statement thesis. States or implies numbers. This type is best used for topics with more than three parts or for very long essays.

This type of thesis can be written in one of two ways. The first is by using numbers in the thesis.

Example: Three factors contributed to the Bronco's failure to advance to the Superbowl.

The French government made three errors which led to the German occupation of France.

The second is almost a reverse of the thesis with key terms. In this form, the three topics of development for the body paragraphs are listed as compound subjects of the sentence.

Example: The Bulls, the Sonics, and the Knicks have developed the best opportunities to advance to postseason playoffs.

Example: Attending class regularly, completing all assignments, and participating in class are the keys to success in high school.

4. Occasion/Position statement = One adverb clause + one independent clause (at a minimum)

See handout. This thesis is a two part thesis that is effective for persuasion and for comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and other essay forms that rely on showing relationships.

The Occasion part:

- Is an adverb clause
- Usually at the beginning of the sentence
- Begins with a subordinate conjunction (See the words on the yellow handout or on the poster)
- Identifies the cause, occasion, problem, solution, reason, background information etc. for writing
- Is the less important section of the sentence

The Position part:

- Is an independent clause
- May be written as:
 - a. a simple thesis
 - b. a thesis with key terms
 - c. a power statement thesis

Example: Even though the economic crisis must be resolved, Congress must seek a solution that provides a long term solution that protects Americans' investments, home ownership, and retirement funds.

Example: Because too many students need remedial classes in college, high schools should increase academic rigor.

5. A thesis sentence should NOT:

- a. Be a Question
- b. Use a linking verb (Linking verbs rely on key terms for assertion.)
- c. Contains such expressions as “ In this paper I will...” or “This paper will be about...”
- d. Be a simple statement of fact. The exceptions would be papers describing a process, clarifying issues, or defining terms
- e. Should avoid the use of the word “ NOT” to develop attitude or assertion.

6. Check your thesis statement:

a. Does it state the subject or main idea?

b. Does it make the purpose clear to your reader?

NOTE: Purpose may include any of the following:

1. to explain a factual subject
2. to relate a personal experience
3. to describe
4. to compare and / or contrast
5. to show cause and effect relationship
6. to persuade
7. to analyze

c. Is it a single declarative sentence?

d. Does it have an action verb? Note: This means that your thesis/topic sentences should NOT be in passive voice.

e. Does it express key terms in parallel structure, coordinate in idea and importance?