

THESIS STATEMENT DOs

Every essay needs a thesis statement. It not only states the writer's position or argument but also gives the reader a general progression of main points. Follow these guidelines to create a coherent thesis.

1. Establish the boundaries of your paper.

As a writer, you must judge whether your thesis statement commits you to something too long, too short, or just right for your instructor's required length.

Ex. An assignment calls for a 750-1000 word (approx. 3-4pages) research paper. You decide to write on Kate Chopin's "Desiree's Baby." You come up with the following thesis: Kate Chopin's use of symbolism and imagery foreshadow the world of Southern patrimony of the story and Armand's place in it, and she also explores the varying attitudes of race in upper class Southern families of the time.

Evaluate the thesis statement you just read. What elements must you consider? Is the thesis statement appropriate for the length of the paper? Why or why not?

2. Narrow the subject to a single, central subject and significant ideas that the essay will support.

Ensure that your thesis makes a point about a topic. Avoid creating just a laundry list of information you find. After your central subject is identified, articulate your main points in the order you will present them.

3. State your position or the point you are arguing, not just a summary of information.

Your thesis should state your position or the points you are arguing. It should synthesize and bring together your analysis of the primary text with your use of outside sources.

4. Revise as needed while you write, and later revise, your paper.

As you write your paper, re-evaluate your thesis statement. Do your main points branch away from the thesis statement? Do you focus on a minor point made in the thesis statement? Because the thesis statement is the reader's guide to your paper, make sure it is accurate with regard to the content of your paper.

5. Write in third person.

Do not use "I" in your thesis statement. Your thesis statement should focus on the point or argument that you will establish throughout the paper; make a firm provable statement rather than saying "I think" or "I believe."

THESIS STATEMENT DON'Ts

1. Focus solely on the subject or a title.

Examples: Racial Conflict in "Desiree's Baby"
Mountain Climbing Challenges

In these instances, the writers have an excellent title for their papers but do not develop the topic with a focused thesis statement.

2. Ask a question.

Examples: At the end of the story, the reader must ask, "Did Armand really grapple with his own 'blackness'?"

At the end of my climb, I wondered if I had really overcome my psychological limits.

Here the writers pose an excellent starting point—questions about a short story and a personal experience—that could lead to a thesis statement.

3. Make an announcement.

Examples: In this paper, I will examine the dynamics of race in the Old South as portrayed by Kate Chopin in her short story "Desiree's Baby."

In my essay, I will talk about how I handled challenges in mountain climbing.

No writer in the humanities begins a paper with an announcement of the topic. Furthermore, the first example announcement does not make a statement of significance about the dynamics of race in the Old South; the second presents a topic but with no focus.

4. State a fact.

Examples: That Desiree is of unknown parentage will ultimately make her marriage complicated.

I met many physical and psychological challenges when I climbed Mt. Everest.

An author must answer the "so what" question in his or her thesis statement. The reader of the above statements will likely say "so what," or more colloquially, "duh."

5. Quote or reference secondary material.

Examples: Critic Marjorie More notes that "Desiree ultimately succumbs to victim status rather than confronting or fleeing the racism of her husband" (12).

Many authors have written about the challenges of climbing Mt. Everest, in particular about the famous "dead zone, where one climber, through almost superhuman endurance, survived the impossible" ("Mt. Everest").

These writers are substituting another's insight or observations in place of his/her own thesis statement.