

Thesis Statements

This tip sheet is adapted from Chapter 5 of *Writing for Sociology* (2nd edition)

A thesis statement is a sentence or two that clearly states the argument you make in your paper.

Two characteristics of thesis statements

- They are debatable, so they must be more than simple statements of fact. There must be some disagreement about the argument to allow for debate.
- They are narrow enough to be successfully supported with evidence.

Two types of thesis statements

- Analytic statements offer arguments about facts. They can be claims of facts or definition. They are about the definition of some phenomenon. For example: “Race is a social construct.” Analytic statements can also be claims of cause and effect, or that one or more things cause another. For example: “Smoking causes lung cancer.”
- Normative statements offer arguments about values. Claims about value argue how important something is. For example: “Light pollution is a pressing environmental issue.” Claims about solutions or policies argue for or against a specific solution to a problem. For example: “Smoking should be outlawed.”

How to develop a thesis statement

- Settle on a topic. This could be one you pick out yourself (e.g. “undocumented college students”) or one the instructor assigns.
- Ask a question about the topic (e.g. “How does being an undocumented immigrant affect undocumented college students’ academic achievement?”).
- Answer your question. This answer is your thesis (e.g. “Undocumented college students suffer academically because they lack the cultural capital necessary in rigorous, independent learning environments.”).
- Conduct more research and tinker with your thesis until you’re satisfied with it.

The thesis as part of the essay

In academic writing, the thesis is usually stated in the introductory paragraph or section. Each section that follows should develop points that support the thesis. Look carefully over each paragraph and section of your paper and ask yourself, what’s this doing in here?

Using evidence to support your thesis

- Effective persuasion involves analyzing objects, events, situations, and issues.
- Each paragraph should express one main idea.
- Include clear transitions between paragraphs and between sentences.
- Consider counter-arguing, or addressing possible arguments against your thesis.