



# Formulating a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement, also referred to as your main argument, is usually a one liner, so to say, that informs the reader of your stance on a topic/what the essay is setting out to do. When drafting a thesis statement is it useful to keep in mind the following:

1. Your thesis statement should convey to the reader how you have interpreted the text under scrutiny.
2. A thesis statement is an answer that you are providing regarding the topic under consideration. This means that you must offer an understanding of the subject under discussion by making a claim about your interpretation of the topic or how the reader should understand that subject. For example, if the subject under study is microfinance in Ghana or the film *Fight Club*, your thesis statement will make a claim of how the reader should understand these subjects.
3. A thesis statement should be as specific as possible. For example, a thesis statement about *Fight Club* should not talk about hypermasculinity, consumerism, capitalist economies, Nietzschean philosophical ideals and the art of satire all in one sentence. Admittedly, these are interrelated subjects in one way or another, however all of them are extremely broad as well. A thesis statement that attempts to make an argument about all of these subjects is bound to fail.
4. Do not make general/sweeping statements. For example, “Tyler Durden, the protagonist in *Fight Club*, takes a heroic stance against capitalism”, fails as a good thesis statement because even when just talking about capitalism, all we are saying is, “Tyler Durden does X which makes him heroic” without fleshing out exactly how doing X makes Tyler ‘heroic.’ Furthermore, we also do not tell our readers what this stance of Durden’s is exactly, or why the reader should be interested in it.
5. The thesis statement is usually found at the beginning or end of the first paragraph. This is because the rest of your essay has to provide support to convince the reader of the validity of your thesis statement.



## Developing a thesis statement

Developing a strong thesis statement, similar to improving your writing, is a matter of practice and patience because while we all have something to say, it takes some time to figure out the optimal way to say it. Thus, as we continue to practice, the time taken to write our thoughts in the most efficient manner will surely decrease.

We shall now work through a sample thesis statement to show how we get from an initial statement to the final one. Let's say that we are taking a course on South Asian History, and have been asked to compare the reasons why the early 16th century Maharaja Sundil and Maharaja Narayan Singh engaged in war with each other. A typical start might be something like this:

*In the early 16th century Maharaja Narayan Singh and Maharaja Sundil engaged in war with each other for two distinct reasons.*

This is a weak thesis statement to make. First of all, it is mostly just a regurgitation of the question itself. Please avoid this in your writings. The reader has no idea what the writer's stance is on this topic and neither do they know what to expect from the paper. A reader will probably not want to continue for two reasons: 1) because it's a little wordy, and 2) they have no idea how these 'reasons' might be similar or different, so they don't really know what the paper is setting out to prove.

To revise this into a proper thesis statement, we should question yourself as to the reasons why the Maharajas engaged in war. Now, we know from your course readings that it was because Maharaja Narayan Singh was a tyrant who supported slavery, while Maharaja Sundil was opposed to such a system. So what we need to do now is put these specifics within our thesis statement. Remember, a thesis statement is nothing if not specific. So, we revise it to:

*While both the Maharajas fought regarding the issue of slavery, Maharaja Sundil opposed slavery, while Maharaja Narayan Singh sought to preserve his control and power harnessed through slavery.*

The above statement may be considered a working thesis now. This is because within this statement we now have a) a reason for the war (remember the question asked us to identify a reason), and b) an idea why both the Maharajas were at loggerheads with one another. This much is enough to propel you into writing your first draft of the essay, but it is far from being a strong statement though, because, remember, a good thesis statement will give the reader a perspective – a different way of understanding the topic, not merely an outline or a list of reasons.

By the time we finish writing our first draft, it might seem that Maharaja Narayan was exactly the tyrant we initially thought of him to be, however, one has to consider that while he did support slavery to maintain control, he had strict laws and checks in place to ensure a decent life for the slaves. Whereas, while Maharaja Sundil believed in the inherent right of self-determination, he was unable to provide a decent life to his subjects. Therefore, we might revise our thesis



statement to better capture this nuance present between the ideologies of the two Maharajas and the ground reality:

My paper argues that while the political system of governance that Maharaja Sundil espoused, where individuality is supreme, was diametrically opposed to Maharaja Narayan's system of strict central control, each Maharaja merely wished to 'free' the opposing Maharaja's subjects from the other's tyranny.

Now, this is a strong thesis statement, because not only does it tell the reader what the reasons for the war were, but it also clearly outlines your own perspective on the topic. This way our paper has a clear direction, and we know what you are setting out to prove through it.