



The Writing Center

UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO
DENVER | ANSCHUTZ MEDICAL CAMPUS

Thesis Statements

The thesis statement is arguably the most important sentence in any essay. It represents the core argument and/or claim of the entire paper. For this reason, you can also think of it as the thread that connects each body paragraph and each sub-claim. The clearer your thesis, the better your body paragraphs and ideas can connect to and support your argument.

This handout reviews how to get started drafting a thesis using the Topic > Position > Rationale (TPR) method, how to evaluate a thesis statement, and where to place your thesis within an essay.

Drafting a Thesis - TPR

A thesis statement is the synthesis of the topic you are discussing (T), your position (or proposition) on that topic (P), and the rationale for your position (R). **Topics** are the focus of your essay, the thing you are actually writing about. **Positions** are arguable stances that you have about a particular topic. **Rationale** indicates the reasons that you hold a position. Below is an example of TPR for an essay on the health benefits of dark chocolate.

Topic: Dark chocolate (in small amounts)

Position: It's beneficial to human health.

Rationale: It raises endorphin levels and provides omega-3 and antioxidants.

Notice how the components of TPR don't necessarily create a thesis statement on their own. The goal of TPR is to clearly identify the components of your argument. The next step is combining this information into a single statement (1-2 sentences). A thesis is greater than the sum of its parts because it synthesizes these components to relate the essence of your argument—it begins a conversation with the reader. Below is the thesis statement drafted from these components.

Dark chocolate consumed in small amounts is beneficial to human health because it raises endorphin levels and is a natural source for omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants.

A good thesis statement makes the most important claim(s) of the paper clear to the reader. It also forecasts the sub-claims that will appear in the body paragraphs. In this example, the reader can

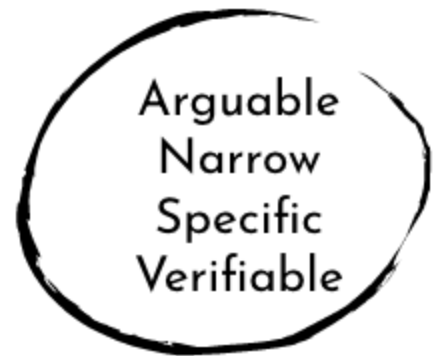
expect at least two body paragraphs exploring the effect of dark chocolate on endorphin levels as well as the benefits of omega-3 fatty acids and antioxidants. A thesis statement does not need to list the topics of each body paragraph, but a general sense of direction helps orient the reader and enhances reader comprehension.

More Tips

- While a thesis statement should be concise, it doesn't have to be a single sentence. As your thesis evolves and becomes more complex, you might need 2 sentences.
- The thesis isn't final until you're finished with the essay: It continues to evolve as the paper expands.

Evaluation

Once you have drafted a thesis statement, you may begin evaluating its strength. Four useful criteria are arguability, narrowness, specificity, and verifiability.



Arguable

A thesis statement should not be a statement of fact. The focus should be on an original claim that someone could reasonably disagree with.

Poor Example: Dark chocolate is a type of chocolate.

This sentence is a fact and not a thesis statement because it does not make an arguable claim.

Narrow

A strong thesis statement should focus on a narrow topic.

Poor Example: Some sweets can be healthy.

Notice how this example does not name a narrow topic. The subject of "sweets" is broad and could include any number of desserts. A narrower thesis could focus the topic on a specific type of sweet (chocolate) or an even narrower topic (dark chocolate). Your assignment prompt and length requirements will also inform the necessary narrowness; shorter essays need a narrower thesis.

Specific

In addition to a narrow topic, a strong thesis statement needs a precise and clearly identifiable position.

Poor Example: Dark chocolate has health benefits.

This example makes a claim (“has health benefits”), but it’s not precise or specific. What does “health benefits” include? Specificity is often tied to the rationale component of TPR. The appropriate amount of rationale should represent the claims made in the body paragraphs. After reading the thesis, will the reader be surprised by any of the supporting claims?

Revised Example: Dark chocolate is healthy because it increases endorphin levels and provides an enticing source of antioxidants.

Verifiable

You must be able to support your thesis statement with evidence.

Poor Example: Eating dark chocolate will help you live forever.

No matter how many health benefits dark chocolate has, it would be difficult to find evidence to support this claim. This thesis is not verifiable. Even if you have not completed all of your research or finalized all of your sub-claims, is it reasonable that you will be able to find evidence supporting your specific claim?

Revised Example: Eating dark chocolate has life-prolonging potential due to its effect on endorphin and cortisol levels.

Placement

Once you have drafted and evaluated a thesis statement, you must place it within the larger essay. The thesis will appear in its most direct form(s) at the end of the introduction paragraph and at the beginning of the conclusion. Additionally, some or all of the thesis should be placed at moments of transition between paragraphs and ideas.

Beginning

Readers expect the first iteration of the thesis to appear at the end of the introduction. This version should be the most efficient. It is the first time the reader is considering your argument, so the sentence(s) must be arguable, narrow, specific, and verifiable.

Middle

At moments of transition, the thesis can serve as analytical reminders to your reader. The entire thesis should not be restated after every paragraph; however, referencing parts of the thesis throughout the essay can strengthen cohesion and keep the reader focused.

End

At the start of the conclusion paragraph, the reader is prepared for the most complex/evolved version of the thesis statement. Greater nuance and more specificity is appropriate here. This version should remind the reader of your central argument and prepare them for a synthesized summary of the essay.

Final Tips

- Keep in mind that every argument and every thesis is part of a larger conversation. By choosing a stance on a topic, you are entering into an existing conversation between researchers and scholars.
- Consider doing most of your research before drafting the first version of your thesis. If you do more research after beginning to write an essay with a draft thesis statement, be sure to revise and improve upon the original thesis.

For further information/related concepts, please see the following handouts:

- Thesis Statement Placement