

Thesis statements are a very important part of a college essay. They state, often in one sentence, the main idea of a paper. When the main idea is presented in a thesis statement, readers can better understand what a paper is about. Thesis statements also help to unify an entire essay, and are typically composed of two parts: the focused topic of the essay, and a preview of the main points about that topic that will be discussed.

The focused topic

The focused topic of an essay expresses the general idea or purpose of a paper. The focused topic is different from a topic sentence found at the beginning of a paragraph. However, just as a topic sentence introduces the main idea or purpose of a single paragraph, the focused topic introduces the main idea or purpose for an entire essay. The reason it is called a focused topic is because topics can be too broad, so an essay usually focuses on a specific aspect of a broad topic. (In the second example below, for instance, the general topic is clowns. What specific aspect of this topic is being addressed? Clowns should be banned from all public areas.) Below is an example of a focused topic sentence for an expository essay:

Frogs are amphibians.

Here is an example of a focused topic sentence for a persuasive essay:

Clowns should be banned from all public areas.

The first sentence would introduce an essay containing facts. The second sentence would introduce an essay that is written to persuade readers to agree with the author's opinion on a subject.

The main points

The main points are the specific aspects of the focused topic that will be discussed in the essay. These points must appear in the body of the essay in the same order as they do in the thesis statement. These points must also be parallel. (For tips on how to make your sentences parallel, see the following section called “Parallelism.”) Below are the focused topics from the previous section with main points added to them. By adding main points to the focused topic, the sentence becomes a complete thesis statement.

Frogs are amphibians who can jump long distances, catch insects with their tongues, and breathe through their skin.

Clowns should be banned from all public areas because they use dangerous equipment such as unicycles, cause harm to people with latex allergies, and frighten some young children.

THESIS STATEMENT

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Parallelism

Parallelism is a way to make sentences flow. Sections of a sentence, whether or not they are in a list, should have the same format. Consider the following sentences about two things that Camille enjoys:

NOT PARALLEL: *Camille enjoys eating ice cream, and goes for walks with her dog.*

PARALLEL: *Camille enjoys eating ice cream, and going for walks with her dog.*

Also, when writing a sentence that includes a list, such as a thesis statement, it is important that any one item from the list joined with the introduction to that list makes a complete sentence. Notice how this works in the following example:

Clowns should be banned from all public areas because they
-use dangerous equipment such as unicycles
-cause harm to people with latex allergies
-frighten some young children

You can choose any one of the main points listed above and put it at the end of “Clowns should be banned from all public areas because they...” and it will make a complete sentence.

THESIS STATEMENT

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Including a thesis statement in an essay

In a typical college essay, the thesis statement will appear last in the introduction paragraph, and first in the conclusion paragraph. In the conclusion, however, the thesis should be restated using different wording (putting it into more than one sentence is a good idea) to avoid repetitiveness. The body paragraphs are used to discuss the main points. Below is a general outline for this kind of paper:

Introduction:

- Background material/other introductory material
- Thesis statement

Body

- Main point 1
- Main point 2
- Main point 3

(Each of the body paragraphs should include a clear topic sentence and concluding sentence, as well as explanations and examples about the main point.)

Conclusion

- Restatement of thesis statement
- Final concluding sentences