

Research Paper 101 Series

Step Four: Drafting a Thesis Statement

Now that we've chosen our topic and completed some initial research, it's time to draft a thesis statement. Your thesis statement is very much like your hypothesis. A hypothesis is an "educated guess" about the relationship between variables that is made with limited evidence as a starting point for further research. While a hypothesis is a statement that will either be proved or disproved as a result of further experiment and inquiry, *a thesis statement is designed to be proved.*



If your research paper was a ship,
your thesis statement would be the rudder that steers it.

1. What is a thesis statement?

Your thesis statement is the central claim or argument you are making in your paper. A good thesis statement:

- informs your reader how you will be discussing and interpreting the topic being covered,
- provides a road map for your paper so your reader knows what to expect,
- is arguable (which also means there are counter-arguments), and
- is most often a single sentence.

2. How do I write it?

Step One: Read through general information you gathered on your topic.

- What important ideas have emerged?
- What relationships do you see among ideas?
- Do you have a direction you would like to take your topic?

You are going to use this information to develop your thesis statement.

Step Two: Identify what kind of research paper you are writing.

There are two main types of research papers:

- Analytical*—The writer has a research question but does not develop an argument to answer this question. Instead of persuading the reader, the purpose of the paper is to explore and evaluate the topic by presenting an understanding of primary and secondary sources.
- Argumentative*—The writer has an opinion or belief which is clearly stated in the thesis statement. The paper is designed to *argue* that point and convince the reader that it is true by using primary and secondary sources and giving an interpretation of them.

Step Three: Draft your thesis statement.

Your thesis statement is a concise synthesis of your research question, themes that emerged during your preliminary research, and the information required for your type of research paper.

The chart below uses the research questions developed in Step Two: Developing a Topic. Notice how each piece of information gathered is used to develop the thesis statement.

Type of Research Paper	Analytical Research Paper	Argumentative Research Paper
Characteristics of Thesis Statement	<i>An analytical thesis statement will answer questions about meaning, purpose, and function. Research questions will typically begin with why or how.</i>	<i>An argumentative thesis statement must be arguable. In other words, there must be more than one opinion.</i>
Example Research Question	How did Witold Pilecki's contributions aid allied resistance during World War II?	What is the significance of the disembodied brain as represented by IT in Madeleine L'Engle's <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> and Alcasan's brain in C.S. Lewis's <i>That Hideous Strength</i> ?
General Information/ Themes Gathered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Polish resistance ▪ imprisoned intentionally at Auschwitz and escaped with intelligence ▪ said to be one of the great Polish heroes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reason is used to fight IT, so reason in and of itself is not evil ▪ love is significant in defeating evil in both books ▪ In both books, the protagonists are aided by the supernatural
Components of a Thesis Statement	Specific Topic + Active Verb + Your Focus/Theme/Idea	Specific Topic + Claim
Examples of Active Verbs	accentuates contributes dramatizes broadens depicts evinces contrasts documents guides distinguishes establishes infers epitomizes foreshadows opposes expresses includes reinforces implies necessitates suggests manifests reflects attempts provides specifies concludes signifies analyzes creates affirms compares directs clarifies conveys elucidates	exemplifies illuminates heightens intends informs predicts portrays reveals renders un.masks uncovers bestows attributes connotes confirms demonstrates defends entertains discloses exposes enlightens illustrates exhibits juxtaposes signals verifies
Example Thesis Statement	Polish hero Witold Pilecki's daring efforts provided valuable intelligence to the Allied Resistance during World War II.	The disembodied brains in both Madeleine L'Engle's <i>A Wrinkle in Time</i> and C.S. Lewis's <i>That Hideous Strength</i> expose the danger of elevating reason to the extent that it is divorced from the spiritual.

This is the rudder for the rest of your paper. Your rudder may need some fine-tuning as you work your way through the research process, but the main idea and guidance it provides will steer you in the right direction.

Next up...Developing an Outline