

## The Thesis Statement

The **thesis statement** of an essay is similar in purpose to the topic sentence of a paragraph. It presents the topic and the controlling idea for the entire essay. The thesis statement also often acts as a guide to other important information:

- ▶ the purpose and corresponding organizational structure of the essay
- ▶ the writer's point of view or opinion about the topic



### IMPORTANT NOTE:

The thesis statement is the "key" to the essay. Without this key it is difficult to unlock the meaning of the essay.

Some thesis statements mention the subdivisions or subtopics that will be treated in the essay. Each of these subtopics then becomes a separate paragraph in the body of the essay. Other thesis statements do not provide the subtopics, but they indirectly say what they will be.

*Direct Thesis Statement:* The financial problems that small residential liberal arts colleges face are the direct result of a decrease in the number of college-age students nationwide, an increase in the proportion of those students who prefer technical and professional training over the traditional liberal arts, and the rapid and far-reaching effects of the distance education movement.

*Indirect Thesis Statement:* There are a number of causes for the financial problems that small residential liberal arts colleges face.

## EXERCISE



## THESIS STATEMENTS

Read the thesis statements and answer the questions.

1. Four major components make up the marketing mix of any successful business: the product itself, the product price, the means of product distribution, and the means of product promotion.

a. What is the topic of this essay? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b. What subtopics will be discussed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

c. Is this a direct or an indirect thesis statement? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

d. How many paragraphs will there probably be in the body of this essay? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- e. Does the writer express an opinion in this thesis statement?

\_\_\_\_\_

If so, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Depression strikes an increasing number of people each year, and its effects can be devastating.

- a. What is the topic of this essay? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- b. Is this a direct or an indirect thesis statement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- c. What is the purpose of this essay? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. You only have to scratch the surface to see how damaging competitive sports really are to the overall psychological development of children.

- a. What is the topic of this essay? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- b. Is this a direct or an indirect thesis statement? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

- c. Does the author express an opinion in this thesis statement?

\_\_\_\_\_

If so, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### *Essay Introductions*

The **introduction** is what readers read first, so it is very important. The introduction presents the essay topic in general. In addition, through the thesis statement, the introduction guides the reader to the essay's overall organization and purpose. The introduction should also include a "hook," something that grabs readers' attention and makes them want to read further.



## Techniques for Writing Essay Introductions

You can use many techniques for writing introductions. The ones described here are hooks to engage readers. You will practice them in later units.

1. **Posing an interesting or controversial question or questions.** (practiced in Unit 2) This technique works well as a hook to draw the reader into the essay. After writers pose the questions, they give general ideas and background information and, finally, the thesis statement.

*Example:*

What if you were to wake up tomorrow morning and have no memory of the past? How would you function? Would you even know who you were? As unlikely as this may seem, it is not impossible. More and more Americans are finding themselves suffering from memory loss, some of it quite fast and without warning. Although one contributor to memory loss is Alzheimer's disease, there are other major causes as well, which can be classified according to the symptoms they produce.

2. **Employing the funnel method.** (practiced in Unit 3) This is probably the most common technique to attract the reader. An introduction that uses the funnel method begins with general ideas about the topic. These ideas gradually become more and more focused until they reach their most specific and focused point in the thesis statement. The funnel method is very common in academic writing. It is not always the most attention-getting method, but it is very effective in introducing readers to complex topics.

*Example:*

Life in the twenty-first century is full of new challenges and opportunities. The pace of change in all areas of daily life makes it difficult to put these challenges and opportunities into perspective. Nevertheless, as the new millennium begins, it is important to take stock of where we have been, where we are today, and where we are going. One of the most obvious places to begin this process is by reviewing the evolution and impact of technology—the technology of the past, technology today, and, perhaps most important of all, the likely technology of our future.



**anonymous:**  
unknown

**motto:** special  
saying

**avail** (oneself) of:  
make use of

**devastating:** very  
harmful

**deftly:** with great  
skill

**barrel:** move  
forward with  
strength

**feat:** achievement;  
accomplishment

3. **Using a relevant quotation.** (practiced in Unit 4) Writers who use this technique are careful to choose quotations written by authorities or by someone who says something especially relevant to their topic. They can then follow this quotation with related background information, which leads into the thesis statement.

*Example:*

"Life is just a bowl of cherries." This well-known, **anonymous** quotation is the **motto** of the optimist, the well-adjusted. It implies that life is full of "tasty" good things, ripe for the choosing, if only you **avail** yourself of the opportunity to pick from among them. However, what if you can't? What if life's cherries are there for the picking, but they always seem out of your reach. What if, for reasons you cannot comprehend, you cannot bring yourself to take advantage of the good things in life, only seeing life as a series of ever-worsening bad happenings. Such is the world of the clinically depressed. Depression strikes an increasing number of people each year, and its effects can be **devastating**.

4. **Making a startling or dramatic observation or describing a scene in a dramatic, humorous, or otherwise interesting way.** (practiced in Unit 5) Further background information then follows the "dramatic" hook of this opening, which then leads to the thesis statement.

*Example:*

He pounds down the court, ball in hands. **Deftly** sidestepping every obstacle in his path, he **barrels** toward the net. Nothing can stop him now. He leaps. For a split second, time stops, and this incredible athlete appears to be suspended in mid-air, his feet at least five feet above the floor. Then, suddenly, time starts again and the crowd begins to roar. Michael Jordan has done it again. He has made an extremely difficult **feat** seem effortless and natural, as though he were born with the ability to leap tall buildings in a single bound. The true story of this athlete's rise to stardom, however, is one of long suffering, hard work, and seemingly endless obstacles.



5. **Turning an argument “on its head.”** (practiced in Unit 7) This fairly sophisticated attention-getting introduction begins with a sentence or two presenting a point of view that is really the opposite of what the writer wants to say. At the end of this introduction, the writer overturns this idea completely and presents the thesis statement, which is the opposite of what he or she started with. This type of introduction is especially useful when the purpose of the essay is to give an opinion or make an argument.

*Example:*

American children are exposed to and **take part in** competitive sports starting at a very early age. By participating in such sports as football, tennis, and basketball, **proponents** claim, children learn the skills necessary to survive in today’s fiercely competitive world. You only have to scratch the surface, however, to see how damaging competitive sports really are to the **overall** psychological development of children.

**take part in:**  
participate in

**proponent:**  
someone in favor of  
something

**overall:** general

## EXERCISE

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## THE INTRODUCTION AND THE THESIS STATEMENT

*Read the introduction and answer the questions.*

