**Creating a thesis statement.**

**What is a thesis statement**?

This is the statement that sets out clearly what your argument on (or analysis of) the topic is, in the essay that will follow.

EG: Teenagers should be able to elect a representative their own age to parliament.

The thesis may be expressed in one or two concise statements.

**Pitfalls**

1. It is best to **avoid** **overly large scope** in the statement or not **clarify** where the essay is going.

EG Eating all foods is good for you with some exceptions.

1. The phrase “all food“ leaves you wide open to the task of having to discuss every edible item on the planet. This is too huge for a single essay of the length you usually have to write in a test or assignment.
2. This statement does not work because it contradicts itself before you even get started and immediately the reader is firstly puzzled, and then unconvinced, from the start.

**So - Narrow the topic.**

It is unhealthy to exclude specific food groups from your diet.

You could add a second sentence:

A scientific balance of foods and cooking methods will enable healthy consumption and weight control without extreme deprivation required.

1. **Never reduce the statement to a phrase or a single word**. For instance, if you are asked to write about a key theme in a piece of literature, do not say:

“The theme of this poetry is War” or The theme of To Kill a Mockingbird is racial prejudice.

This just indicates the subject of the text.

What do **you** want to say about the subject? Make this your thesis.

EG This poetry presents us with a sense of the horror of war emphasising that it is not ever glorious or heroic.

This statement focuses on the key aspect of the messages in the poetry (war is full of horror) and indicates the second key element of the purpose behind the poetry which is to negate a false concept of war -that it provides a chance to be a hero. The two elements are strongly linked and are not two different topics bound up in one statement.

**How to Generate a Thesis Statement from scratch for a research project (any project- literature/opinion essay or a history or science investigation)**

Your thesis statement needs to answer a question about the issue you’d like to explore. Your job is to figure out what you’d like to write about.

A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes :

* take on a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree
* deal with a subject that can be adequately treated given the nature of the assignment
* express one main idea
* assert your conclusions about a subject

The steps you will take to generate a thesis statement for an opinion /research essay for an English essay or perhaps a research project for food and nutrition .

*Brainstorm the topic*.  
Let’s say that your class focuses upon the problems posed by changes in the dietary habits of modern westerners. You find that you are interested in the amount of fast food consumed.

You start out with a thesis statement like this:

**Fast food consumption.**

This fragment isn’t a thesis statement. Instead, it simply indicates a general subject. Furthermore, your reader doesn’t know what you want to say about this.

*Narrow the topic*.  
Your readings about the topic, however, have led you to the conclusion that secondary school children are consuming far more fast food than is healthy.

You change your thesis to look like this:

**Reducing fast food consumption by secondary school children in New Zealand.**

This fragment not only announces your subject, but it focuses on one segment of the population: secondary school children. Furthermore, it raises a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree, because while most people might agree that children consume more fast food than they used to, not everyone would agree on what should be done or who should do it. You should note that this fragment is not a thesis statement because your reader doesn’t know your conclusions on the topic.

*Take a position on the topic.*  
After reflecting on the topic a little while longer, you decide that what you really want to say about this topic is that something should be done to reduce the amount of fast food these children consume.

You revise your thesis statement to look like this

**More attention should be paid to the food choices available to secondary school children.**

This statement asserts your position, but the terms *more attention* and *food choices* are vague.

*Use specific language*.  
You decide to explain what you mean about *food choices*, so you write:

**Experts estimate that half of all secondary school children in New Zealand consume seventy percent more sugars and fats than the recommended daily allowance in their weekly fast food meals.**

This statement is specific, but it isn’t a thesis. It merely reports a statistic instead of making an assertion.

*Make an assertion based on clearly stated support.*  
You finally revise your thesis statement one more time to look like this:

**As half of all secondary school children in New Zealand consume seventy percent more sugars and fats than the recommended daily allowance in fast foods, schools should provide educational programmes for students and parents about this, and offer possible alternative choices .**

Notice how the thesis answers the question, “What should be done to reduce fast food consumption by children, and who should do it?” When you start thinking about the paper, you may not have a specific question in mind, but as you become more involved in the topic, your ideas become more specific. Your thesis will change to reflect your new insights.

## How to Tell a Strong Thesis Statement from a Weak One

#### 1. A strong thesis statement takes some sort of stand.

Remember that your thesis needs to show your conclusions about a subject. For example, if you are writing a paper for a class on fitness, you might be asked to choose a popular weight-loss product to evaluate. Here are two thesis statements:

**There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.**

This is a weak thesis statement. First, it fails to take a stand. Second, the phrase negative and positive aspects is vague.

**Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.**

This is a strong thesis because it takes a stand, and because it's specific.

#### 2. A strong thesis statement justifies discussion.

Your thesis should indicate the point of the discussion. If your assignment is to write a paper on kinship systems, using your own family as an example, you might come up with either of these two thesis statements:

**My family is an extended family.**

This is a weak thesis because it merely states an observation. Your reader won’t be able to tell the point of the statement, and will probably stop reading.

**While most American families would view consanguineal marriage as a threat to the nuclear family structure, many Iranian families, like my own, believe that these marriages help reinforce kinship ties in an extended family.**

This is a strong thesis because it shows how your experience contradicts a widely-accepted view. A good strategy for creating a strong thesis is to show that the topic is controversial. Readers will be interested in reading the rest of the essay to see how you support your point.

#### 3. A strong thesis statement expresses one main idea.

Readers need to be able to see that your paper has one main point. If your thesis statement expresses more than one idea, then you might confuse your readers about the subject of your paper. For example:

**Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.**

This is a weak thesis statement because the reader can’t decide whether the paper is about marketing on the Internet or Web pages. To revise the thesis, the relationship between the two ideas needs to become clearer. One way to revise the thesis would be to write:

**The Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, so companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.**

This is a strong thesis because it shows that the two ideas are related. Hint: a great many clear and engaging thesis statements contain words like because, since, so, although, unless, and however.

#### 4. A strong thesis statement is specific.

A thesis statement should show exactly what your paper will be about, and will help you keep your paper to a manageable topic. For example, if you're writing a seven-to-ten page paper on hunger, you might say:

**World hunger has many causes and effects.**

This is a weak thesis statement for two major reasons. First, world hunger can’t be discussed thoroughly in seven to ten pages. Second, many causes and effects is vague. You should be able to identify specific causes and effects. A revised thesis might look like this:

**Hunger persists in XYZA because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.**

This is a strong thesis statement because it narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic, and it also identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger.

## How to Generate a Thesis Statement if the Topic is Assigned

Almost all assignments, no matter how complicated, can be reduced to a single question. Your first step, then, is to distill the assignment into a specific question. For example, if your assignment is, “Write a report to the local school board explaining the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class,” turn the request into a question like, “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?” After you’ve chosen the question your essay will answer, compose one or two complete sentences answering that question.

**Q:** “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?”

**A:** “The potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class are . . .”

***OR***

**A:** “Using computers in a fourth-grade class promises to improve . . .”

The answer to the question is the thesis statement for the essay.

Responding to a Literature Topic in an exam paper

If we apply this to test questions at Level 3 on the novel, let us see if it works

Q4. Settings are the key to many thematic purposes in texts.

Generates the questions:

Are settings the key to understanding themes in my text? or

Are settings the only way/ the strongest way to understand themes in my texts?

And from this I may generate a thesis such as

In Life of Pi, settings play a strong role in supporting several essential ideas in the text but other devices such as symbolism contribute almost as much.

Adapted from: Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN