

In Context Toolbox – How to Write a Thesis Statement

The **In Context Toolbox** tip sheets are designed to help middle school and high school researchers prepare a written report. This document will explain how to **write a thesis statement** for your report.

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If you imagine an essay as a plant, the thesis statement is the seed that grew into the plant. A well-written paper literally grows out of its thesis statement. This is because the thesis statement expresses the main idea of your paper. You should put your thesis statement in the introductory paragraph, preferably as the very first sentence. This way, readers of your essay will immediately know:

- The topic of your paper.
- Your core argument concerning the topic.

Writing a Thesis Statement

A well-conceived thesis statement has two parts. The first part is the simply the topic of your paper. The second part, called the "comment," is the main idea you want to express about your topic. Here's a schematic representation of a thesis statement:

	Part One	Part Two
Semantic Structure:	Topic	Comment
Grammatical Structure:	Subject	Predicate
Questions to answer:	What's your paper about?	What's your take on this topic?
Example:	<i>Salmon and steelhead populations</i>	<i>Will decline unless their spawning habitats are protected.</i>

Notice that the thesis statement is essentially a **logical proposition**. It's either true or it's false. Your paper, of course, is going to be filled with material designed to prove that your thesis is true. If you're not sure how to come up with strong arguments to support your thesis, consult the **How to Build an Argument** tip sheet.

Notice also that the comment portion of your thesis statement is the core argument of your paper. It's the main point of your essay. Everything else in your paper should support this main idea.

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Let's consider some more examples of thesis statements:

Father Junipero Serra and the Spanish missionaries helped shape California's social structures and settlement patterns.

The work of German physicist Werner Heisenberg was crucial to the development of quantum theory.

*Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* explores themes of guilt and redemption in Colonial society.*

A carefully crafted thesis statement serves as the basis for a well-written essay.

The thesis statements in the list above share five key characteristics:

- The topic portion is explicitly defined and easy for the reader to identify.
- The comment portion is focused, manageable, and provable.
- The meaning of the statement is clear and unmistakable.
- The statement is plausible on its face; that is, it has the "ring of truth."
- The statement is engaging enough to capture the attention of the reader.

When you write your paper, try to write a thesis statement that conforms to these five criteria.

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