



Prewriting and Thesis Statement Strategies

Sponsored by The Center for Teaching and Learning at UIS



What is a Thesis?

A thesis statement is a sentence (or sentences) that expresses the main ideas of your paper and answers the question or questions posed by your paper. It offers your readers a quick and easy to follow summary of what the paper will be discussing and what you as a writer are setting out to tell them. The kind of thesis that your paper will have will depend on the purpose of your writing. This handout will cover general thesis statement tips, explain some of the different types of thesis statements, and provide some links to other resources about writing thesis statements.

Start Creating a Thesis Statement

1. Analyze your topic. For example, ask yourself the question, “What do you notice?” What do you notice about your topic? Do you notice any patterns in your pre-writing?
2. Focus on the rank of each detail. What three details are more interesting, significant, revealing or strange? Circle these in your pre-writing activity.
3. Write down why they struck you as the most interesting. This step is to analyze your topic. Don’t generalize or jump to judgment.
4. After you have determined the most interesting subtopics, make an assertion – a sentence stating your topic and the point you want to make about it.
5. If you are having trouble coming up with an assertion, change your topic into a question that your essay can answer. After you have created the question, develop the answer.

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.

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

How to Generate a Thesis Statement if the Topic is Not Assigned.

Even if your assignment doesn’t ask a specific question, your thesis statement still needs to answer a question about the issue you’d like to explore. In this situation, your job is to figure out what question you’d like to write about.

A Bad Thesis Statement

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

A Good Thesis Statement

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.

Websites for Reference

General Thesis Statement Tips

http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/print/general/gl_thesis.html

Good Examples of Thesis Statements

<http://www.rpi.edu/web/writingcenter/thesis.html>



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What are pre-writing strategies?

Have you ever experienced procrastination because you did not know what to write about? Learning and knowing how to use pre-writing strategies sets the writer up for success. These strategies are tools of the trade and can help a writer overcome writer's block. In addition, pre-writing helps the writer determine what he or she will be writing about. Lastly, it lets the writer explore the topic thoroughly.

The Pre-Writing Process

1. Who is your audience?
2. What is your purpose for writing?
3. What is your topic?
4. Choose a pre-writing strategy.

Other Pre-Writing Strategies

Conducting Research
Formal and informal reading
Interviews
Outlining
Remembering
Drawing
Discussion
Note taking

Pre-Writing Strategies

Freewriting

Given a topic the writer continues to write for a set period of time, without stopping. Freewriting is similar to brainstorming, but instead of just single words, you write down whole sentences about the topic.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming and listing go together. To brainstorm an idea, write down as many words that come to mind when thinking of your topic. You can organize them of importance later on or throw out words that don't really apply to your topic.

Mapping and Webbing

Organizing your ideas in a map or web is a visual form of outlining. You can connect like terms and ideas, create paragraphs by connecting those ideas and looking for patterns, and coaches the writer into thinking how the first draft will be organized.

Websites for Reference

Resources for Pre-Writing Strategies

http://ww2.sjc.edu/faculty_pages/jarzt/wac-pre.htm.

Examples of Pre-Writing Strategies

<http://www.inspiration.com/vlearning/index.cfm?fuseaction=webs>

The Writing Process

http://www.psesd.org/technology/writeprocess/process/prewrite_new.html

Writing Handouts

<http://www.uis.edu/ctl/writinghandouts.htm>

Listing

Listing can help generate subtopics. Once identified, those subtopics can be at the top of another list.

Journal

Response journals and dialogue journals offer the author growth and a chance to analyze your subject that you are going to write about. Often the response journal starts with a prompt and by writing about the topic of the prompt, it offers the writer a chance to become a more proficient writer through practice. Dialogue journals include someone else's opinion about the topic. Such as an online discussion would, with threads for each new response.

Flow Charts

Flow charts is another visual way to organize your ideas. Flow charts usually move from the top to bottom of a page and can easily be turned into an outline, using the main ideas as headings and subheadings and adding new ideas until an outline takes shape.