

Thesis Statements

Have you ever told a really exciting (at least from your perspective) story to a friend, then delivered the punchline only to have that friend stare at you blankly, a bewildered expression on their face?

"Wait. What are you talking about?" asks the friend.

That, in a nutshell, is what happens to a reader of an academic paper when there is no forceful, coherent, articulate *thesis* statement present at the beginning of the paper.

First, what is, specifically, the function of a thesis statement? Your textbook offers the following definition:

A thesis is a debatable point, one about which reasonable persons can disagree. It is not merely a fact. Nor is it a statement of belief or faith. Neither facts nor beliefs can be substantiated by reasons, so they cannot serve as a thesis for an argument.

Whew. Got it? Maybe not. Just remember, first and foremost, that a thesis has to have *reasonably* debatable aspects. So, you cannot merely say: "Gun control laws are wrong." Sure, that's debatable in a very black-and-white sense, but there is no complexity to your statement. It borders on giving away your personal beliefs on the topic of gun control laws. Rather than offer arguments in broad brush strokes, you might choose to tackle very specific, distinguishable aspects of a larger issue. So, in the gun control example you may say something like: "The initiative to outlaw the sale of fully automatic firearms is flawed, because now the common citizen who chooses to acquire a weapon to protect themselves is at a disadvantage against the criminal, who can acquire a fully-automatic weapon through illegal means." That, of course, is a very basic thesis. Notice, the general thrust of the argument is obvious. But there is no real complexity here. Will the civilian versus criminal be the only argument against fully-automatics? I hope not, or else it won't be a very convincing paper. A thesis should strive to, as much as possible, incorporate numerous of the paper's main arguments. Let's look at some other sources to get a better picture of the function of a thesis statement.

The prime directive in academic and professional writing is clear communication. This means that your ideas are presented in a logical, orderly manner so that the reader is able to gain the maximum of understanding with the minimum of time and effort. To achieve this effect, you must use structure and organization so that one thing leads to or is built upon another.

Johnson, Andrew. *A Short Guide to Academic Writing*. University Presses of America: New York, 2003. 32.

Notice, here, what Johnson says is our number one mission in an academic paper: namely, to leave no room for misinterpretation, to give the reader