Wait...why do I even need a thesis statement?

An important part of a college education is the ability to think critically, and the proof of this ability partly lies with your successful construction of argumentative essays that include and persuasively support strong positions.
Will I always need a thesis statement?

Not all papers require thesis statements! In some kinds of writing, such as narratives or descriptions, a thesis statement may be less important.

However, you may still want to provide some kind of statement in your first paragraph that helps to guide your reader through your paper. Ask your instructor if you're in doubt whether you need one.
So, what is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement . . .

- Makes an argumentative assertion about a topic; it states the conclusions that you have reached about your topic.
What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement . . .

• Makes a promise to the reader about the **scope**, **purpose**, and **direction** of your paper.
What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement . . .

• Is **focused** and **specific** enough to be "proven" within the boundaries of your paper.
What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement . . .

- Is generally located near the end of the introduction; sometimes, in a long paper, the thesis will be expressed in several sentences or in an entire paragraph.
What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement . . .

• Identifies the relationships between the pieces of evidence that you are using to support your argument.
Ok...so how do I compose a thesis statement?

A. Write it immediately before you do any research so that you have a clear idea of what research you need to do.

B. Buy it off the internet.

C. Develop a working thesis statement that you can revise as you conduct research and think more about your topic.
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A thesis is the evolutionary result of a thinking process, not a miraculous creation. Formulating a thesis is not the first thing you do after reading an essay assignment.

*Deciding on a thesis does not come first.*
Ok...so how do I compose a thesis statement?

Before you can come up with an argument on any topic, you have to:

- collect and organize evidence
- look for possible relationships between known facts, and
- think about the beneath-the-surface significance of these relationships.
Ok...so how do I compose a thesis statement?

After an initial exploration of the question at hand, you can formulate a "working thesis," an argument that you think will make sense of the evidence/research that you’ve collected but that may need adjustment along the way.
Ok...so how do I compose a thesis statement?

Following are some strategies for developing a working thesis statement:

- Write a purpose statement
- Turn an assignment question into a rationalized assertion
- Summarize the main idea
- List the ideas you want to include
- Use a formula
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

"Do I respond to the assignment?"

- No matter how intriguing or dazzling, a thesis that doesn't answer the question or meet the assignment’s requirements is not a good thesis! If you are being asked to "take a stand," do you? Re-reading the question promptly after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

"Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?"

If not, then you probably do not have a strong argument. Theses that are too vague often have this problem. If your thesis contains vague words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: why is something “good” and what makes something “successful”?
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

"Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?"

Another reason a thesis may not pass this test is if it is simply a statement and not a thesis statement. In other words, avoid using facts or assertions with which most readers would agree as a thesis statement. It’s hard to challenge a fact!
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

“Can I prove my position with academic research and evidence?”

Be wary of opinion! If it’s difficult for another reader to argue your position it may be because you are relying on personal feelings or preferences.

• Along similar lines, make sure your thesis statement offers a reasonable position. Someone might challenge an outlandish claim, but how will you support it in the essay?
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

"Does my thesis pass the 'So What?' test?"

- The "So What?" test asks whether your thesis presents a position or an interpretation worth pursuing. If a reader's first response is, "So what?" then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
How do I know I’m working with an effective thesis statement?

"Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?"

• Just as a thesis that doesn't answer the question ultimately fails, so does a thesis that isn't properly supported with evidence and reasoning. If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
Some MYTHS about thesis statements!

Myth #1: Every paper requires one.

Myth #2: A thesis statement must come at the end of the first paragraph.

Myth #3: A thesis statement must be one sentence in length, no matter how many clauses it contains.

Myth #4: You can’t start writing an essay until you have a perfect thesis statement.

Myth #5: A thesis statement must give three points of support.
Now it’s time to play...

What’s Wrong with this Thesis Statement???
What’s wrong with this thesis statement?

“Frederick Douglass made a speech in which he wondered why slaves should celebrate the Fourth of July.”
What’s wrong with this thesis statement?

“Of all examples of persuasive speaking in American history, Frederick Douglass’ ‘What to the Slave is the Fourth of July’ is far and away the most effective.”
What’s wrong with this thesis statement?

“Throughout American history, brave leaders have stood up against oppression of all kinds.”
Time to practice!
Taming the Thesis Statement

Workshop developed by
Shannon Dougherty and
Veronica Pantoja
Sources

• **Developing a Thesis Statement** from the Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison
  

• **Writing a Thesis Statement** from the OWL at Purdue University
  
Sources

• **Constructing Thesis Statements** from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

• **Using Thesis Statements** from the University of Toronto.
  http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/thesis.html

• **Writing an Effective Thesis Statement** from Temple University.
For additional help in constructing effective thesis statements, arguments, paragraphs, etc., please visit the Writing Center!

The Writing Center is located in LIB 227 on the Pecos Campus and in BRID 114 on the Williams Campus.