

Developing Your Essay: Thesis Statement to Outline

A **thesis statement** is a sentence that presents the main point of an essay, just as a **topic sentence** presents the main point of a paragraph. A topic sentence is generally the first sentence of a body paragraph. The thesis statement typically appears in the introductory paragraph.

A strong thesis statement:

- States a single main point that you can show, explain, or prove
- Prepares readers for the rest of the essay
- Is specific, not vague
- Is a forceful statement written in confident, firm language
- Contains a focus (the main topic) and a purpose (what you plan to show, explain, or prove about that topic)

To make your thesis statement more specific and concrete, refer to each of the main supporting points you will cover in your paper.

Vague	Our campus cafeteria (focus) has many problems (purpose).
Concrete	Our cafeteria's (focus) problems include poorly cooked meals, a bad floor plan, and an unhelpful staff (purpose).

By including more details, you not only make your thesis statement more interesting, you also give your readers a clearer idea of your point.

General	I saw an interesting movie (no focus, vague purpose).
Specific	The movie <i>Dean Man Walking</i> (focus) forces viewers to confront the death penalty (purpose).

Write a forceful, definite statement. Do *not* write a thesis statement that begins, "In this essay I will show..." Don't say you *will* make a point, just make it.

Weak	In this essay, I will show the importance of body language.
Forceful	Body language reveals much about a person.

Now that you have a strong thesis statement, you are ready to plan the content of your essay. One way to do this is to use an **outline**. A formal outline should include your thesis statement, a list of your major topics, and must follow these guidelines:

- At least two subheadings under each heading. Because subheadings divide up the ideas in a heading, you must have at least two subheadings under each heading.
- Logical subheadings. Because subheadings break up or divide ideas in the headings they stand under, they must reflect the ideas of those broader headings.
- Standard outline subdivisions are as follows:

Thesis Statement
I. Major Idea
A. Supporting idea for I

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- B. Supporting idea for I
 - 1. Example or illustration of B
 - 2. Example or illustration of B
 - a. Detail for 2
 - b. Detail for 2

II. Major Idea

Sample of a formal outline

Thesis Statement

By lowering the barriers of physical appearance in communication, the Internet's uniquely anonymous form of interaction could build diversity into community.

- I. No fear of being prejudiced
 - A. Unknown physical attributes
 - 1. Gender
 - 2. Age
 - 3. Race
 - 4. Style
 - B. Freer communication
 - C. No automatic rejection
- II. Inability to prejudge others
 - A. No assumptions based on appearance
 - 1. Body type
 - 2. Physical disability
 - 3. Race
 - B. Discovery of shared interests and concerns
 - 1. Sports and other activities
 - 2. Family values
 - 3. Political views
 - C. Reduction of physical bias

Outlining can be an excellent tool for brainstorming and organizing your thoughts before writing your essay. The examples used in this handout are for formal outlines; however, there are many other helpful brainstorming pre-writing methods that can be used. Find the one that you are most comfortable with and have a great time writing your essay.

On the next two pages, we have provided a worksheet to guide you through the outlining process. Please note that you may not use all of the subheadings available, or you may need additional subheadings for your outline.

Information adapted from these sources:

Writing from A to Z by Sally B Ebest, Gerald J. Alred, Charles T. Brusaw, & Walter E. Oliu
The Ready Reference Handbook by Jack Dodds
The Little, Brown Compact Handbook 4th Ed. by Jane E. Aaron
Real Writing with Readings by Susan Anker

Thesis Statement

I. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

C. _____

II. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

C. _____

III. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

C. _____
