

September 30, 2015 // The Writer's Toolbox: Thesis statements

From Diana Hacker's *A Writer's Reference, Sixth Edition* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), pages 355-56:

MLA-1 Form a tentative thesis

Once you have read a variety of sources and considered all sides of your issue, you are ready to form a tentative thesis: a one-sentence (or occasionally a two-sentence) statement of your central idea (see C2-1). In a research paper, your thesis will answer the central research question you posed earlier (see R1-a). Here, for example, are Anna Orlov's research question and her tentative thesis statement.

Orlov's research question

Should employers monitor their employee's online activities in the workplace?

Orlov's tentative thesis

Employers should not monitor their employees' online activities because electronic surveillance can compromise workers' privacy.

After you have written a rough draft and perhaps done more reading, you may decide to revise your tentative thesis, as did Orlov.

Orlov's revised thesis

Although companies often have legitimate concerns that lead them to monitor employees' Internet usage—from expensive security breaches to reduce productivity—the benefits of electronic surveillance are outweighed by its costs to employees' privacy and autonomy.

The thesis usually appears at the end of the introductory paragraph. To read Anna Orlov's thesis in the context of her introduction, see page 408.

From Hacker 67:

A2 Constructing reasonable arguments

In writing an argument, you take a stand on a debatable issue. The question being debated might be a matter of public policy:

Should religious groups be allowed to meet on public school property?

What is the least dangerous way to dispose of nuclear waste?

Should a state enact laws rationing medical care?

On such questions, reasonable people may disagree.

Reasonable men and women also disagree about many scholarly issues. Psychologists debate the role of genes and environment in behavior; historians interpret causes of the Civil War quite differently; biologists challenge one another's predictions about the effects of global warming.

When you construct a reasonable argument, your goal is not simply to win or to have the last word. Your aim is to explain your understanding of the truth about a subject or to propose the best solution available for solving a problem—without being needlessly combative. In constructing your argument, you join a conversation with other writers and readers. Your aim is to convince readers to reconsider their opinions by offering new reasons to question an old viewpoint.

ACADEMIC ENGLISH Some cultures value writers who argue with force and express their superiority. Other cultures value writers who argue subtly or indirectly, often with an apology. Academic audiences in the United States will expect your writing to be assertive and confident—neither aggressive nor passive. Create an assertive tone by acknowledging different opinions and supporting your view with specific evidence.

TOO AGGRESSIVE Of course prayer should be discouraged in public schools. Only foolish people think that organized prayer is good for everyone.

TOO PASSIVE I might be wrong, but I think that organized prayer should be discouraged in public schools.

ASSERTIVE TONE Organized prayer should be discouraged in public schools because it violates the religious freedom guaranteed by the First Amendment.

If you are uncertain about the tone of your work, ask for help at your school's writing center.

1. Using examples from Hacker, identify elements of a strong thesis statement. What are some characteristics of a strong thesis statement? What do effective thesis statements do? What do they sound like? What information do they include?

2. When the class establishes a definition of an ideal thesis statement, write it here.

3. Work with your own thesis statements. Using your draft of paper 2, locate your thesis statement. If you don't have one in your draft now, draft a tentative one now. Write your thesis statement (**but not your name**) at the top of an index card. Beneath the thesis statement, draw a vertical line, with the words "Strengths" and "Weaknesses" at the tops of the columns. Your card should look like this:

Yankee stadium should give every fan a free cupcake at every home game.	
Strengths	Weaknesses

4. Work with your group members to compare your thesis statements with the examples on the other side of this handout. What are their strengths and weaknesses? Pass the cards around your group, writing comments in the appropriate columns.

5. Revise your thesis statement now, based on the discussions we've had in class today. You can work with your group mates as you revise. Write your new thesis statement on the **other side** of your card, crossing out the old one with a big X.

6. Work in your group to evaluate each thesis statement based on the definition in number 2.