

Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



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Thesis and Topic Statements



Academic writing revolves around topics and thesis statements. This brochure outlines how to develop both during the writing process.

Choosing a Subject and Topic

The first step in writing a paper is to choose a subject. The subject is a broad area of knowledge, such as “slavery in South Carolina.”

Unfortunately, many students go no farther than this step. They gather some information on their subject and write a paper that is impossibly broad.

Instead, your research on your subject should enable you to focus on a specific topic within that subject area:

- slave narratives
- urban slaves
- literacy among slaves

Asking Questions

With this narrower topic in mind, you can focus your research on particular questions about your topic.

- How reliable are slave narratives? What do they tell us about living conditions?
- What were the roles and conditions of urban slaves? How did they differ from rural slaves?
- How and why were slaves educated? What were the results of such education?

Forming a Thesis

Now that you have specific questions about your topic, your research should aim to answer those questions. Your answer becomes the basis for your thesis statement.

Depending on what type of paper you have been assigned, your thesis may be a generalization that requires supporting evidence, a controversial

statement that you must prove, an analytical statement that sets up the structure of the essay, or any one of a number of other forms. Whatever form it takes, your thesis must express *your particular viewpoint* on your topic. It is your unique answer to the question your topic has raised.

Comparing Topic and Thesis Statements

A topic statement announces the purpose, scope, and direction of a paper. It gives readers an idea of what to expect. Common beginnings are:

- This paper examines . . .
- The aim of this paper is to . . .
- The purpose of this essay is to . . .

Generally, topic statements reveal how the argument will be developed but do not state any particular conclusions.

Thesis statements, on the other hand, do state a conclusion. A strong thesis statement makes a claim that is worth supporting. It stimulates curiosity in readers and prompts them to read on. And it forecasts the main point of your paper.

A thesis statement makes an argument about your topic and lays out how the topic will be developed. It does not simply announce the topic; it says something important about the topic.

In the following text, the topic sentence is in italics, and the thesis sentence is in boldface type.

This paper will analyze three narratives written by slaves located in rural South Carolina and will examine evidence of the narratives' authenticity. **The narratives themselves and the documents supporting them demonstrate how the slaves' deplorable living conditions led directly to their desire to document their lives.**

Short papers and papers in certain fields do not necessarily require a topic sentence. Check your assignment, or check with your professor, to determine whether you need a topic sentence.

All academic papers require some sort of thesis sentence.

For you, the writer, the thesis sentence serves as a planning tool; it helps you focus your thinking as you write. For your readers, the thesis maps the territory of your paper. It keeps readers focused on your argument.

Accessing More Information

- Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- The Writing Center at The University of Wisconsin – Madison: www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbooks.
- Raimes, Ann. *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008.

Acknowledgments

Information from this brochure was adapted from:

“Creating a Thesis Statement.” The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. 26 Jan. 2009 <<http://english.purdue.edu/resource/545/01/>>.

Raimes, Ann. “Developing a Focus and a Thesis.” *Keys for Writers*. 5th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008. 18-22.