

The Thesis Statement and the Essay Map

The Thesis Statement: What It Does

- The thesis statement expresses the central idea of the essay; i.e., it *unifies* the content of the essay by stating the main idea of the paper.

EXAMPLE: *Increasing the state tax on cigarettes will adversely affect not only the nicotine addict but his or her family as well.*

This sentence states that the essay will be about why increasing the price of cigarettes will have negative effects on addicts and their families.

- The thesis statement represents a promise to the reader that the essay will focus only on the stated topic; i.e., it *limits* the scope of the essay.

In our example above, the writer promises to discuss only the adverse effects of the price hike on certain people, namely, nicotine addicts and their families. The writer will not talk about the benefits to either society or any individuals, nor will the writer talk about the impact of the price hike on any other groups or individuals except the nicotine addict and his or her family.

- The thesis statement expresses the writer's opinion about the topic.

In our example, the writer expresses the opinion that increasing the tax on cigarettes will have an adverse effect on addicts and addicts' families.

- The thesis statement represents a promise to the reader that everything in the thesis will be explained and supported.

In our example, the writer is promising to explain to readers why increasing the tax on cigarettes will negatively affect addicts and their families and to provide specific details that support those claims.

The Thesis Statement: What It Looks Like

- The thesis statement is located in the introductory paragraph, almost always at the end of that paragraph.
- It usually consists of a single sentence.

EXAMPLE: *Increasing the state tax on cigarettes will adversely affect not only the nicotine addict but his or her family as well.*

- The thesis statement contains two essential elements: (1) the narrow topic and (2) the writer’s opinion or claim about that topic; i.e., it provides a *specific* focus for the reader.

In our example, the narrow topic is *increasing the state tax on cigarettes*. The writer’s opinion or claim is that it *will adversely affect not only the nicotine addict but his or family as well*.

- The thesis statement does not contain any specific details, which are reserved for support in the body paragraphs.

In our example, the writer offers no facts or details to support the claims of adverse effects on addicts or family members.

- The thesis statement is never expressed as a question.

In the example, if the writer had phrased the thesis as a question, then the statement would lack a claim or opinion and make no promises of limits or unity.

- With very rare exceptions, the thesis statement is not expressed as a promise or statement of intention

In our example, it would be inappropriate for the writer to begin the thesis with *I will prove* or *I intend to*. Doing so would suggest that the writer’s claim is still speculation, rather than an existing truth which the essay will explain and document.

- Very often the thesis statement will include a third element: an essay map.

The Essay Map: What It Does

- The essay map lists the ideas or points the writer will use to support the thesis.

An essay map for the thesis in our example might look like this:

Higher prices on cigarettes means addicts must choose between combating their addiction and taking money from other areas of the family budget to continue to support their addiction at its existing level.

- The essay map lists those ideas or points in the order in which they will be discussed in the essay.

In our example, the reader will expect the writer to first address the adverse effects on the addict and the family if the addict chooses to “cut back” or quit altogether, and then address the impact if the addict chooses to reallocate the family income instead.

- In other words, the essay map provides the reader with a map of the route the essay will travel.

The Essay Map: What it Looks Like

- The essay map very often appears as a “because” clause.

In our example, the writer might have included such a clause in the thesis: *Higher taxes on cigarettes will hurt addicts and their families, because the addicts will be forced to reduce their drug intake or finance their existing habit by taking money from other areas of the family budget.*

- The essay map may be part of the thesis statement or may be a separate statement before or after the thesis statement.

With minimal adjustment, the following essay map statement could be used either before or after the thesis statement:

Higher prices on cigarettes means addicts must choose between combating their addiction and taking money from other areas of the family budget to continue to support their addiction at its existing level.

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<<http://lsc.edcc.edu/Handouts/Thesis.php>>

Wyrick, Jean. Steps to Writing Well. Boston: Heinle, 2002.