



Why do we write essays, anyway? A writer may write for several reasons, but one of the main reasons a writer composes an essay is to clarify for a particular audience his/her answer to a specific critical question about the world around him/her. A **thesis statement**—which is essentially a relatively succinct answer to a critical question—aids in this communicative process by helping an audience understand what question the writer is asking, why that question is important, and how the writer has responded to that question.

Creating a Working Thesis Statement

1. Topic: What is your topic?

Example: The four day school week.

2. Question: What is a question you have about your topic?

Example: Should the University of Montana move to a four day school week?

3. Answer: Rephrase the question as an attempt to answer the question.

Example: The University of Montana should not move to a four day school week.

4. Elaboration: Tell why you answer the question this way.

Example: The University of Montana should not move to a four day school week because increasing students' workloads on Mondays through Thursdays will make it more difficult for them to excel in their studies, will impact their extracurricular activities, and will not save the institution enough money to justify such an action.

***Note: As you continue to investigate your topic, you may find yourself asking a slightly different question, answering your question in a new way, or discovering new points of elaboration. While becoming more familiar with a topic, good writers pay attention to and make note of these changes.**

1. Topic: _____

2. Question: _____

3. Answer: _____

4. Elaboration: _____

¹ Examples adapted from The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Writing Tutorial Services at Indiana University.

Evaluating Your Working Thesis Statement

It is important to keep in mind that creating a thesis statement is a process, and that your thesis may change as you explore your topic. Once you've constructed a working thesis statement for your essay (see reverse), you might begin your thesis revision process by asking yourself if your thesis statement meets the **SODA** criteria.

S: Is your thesis statement **specific**?

O: Does it express **one main idea**?

D: Is it **discussable**?

A: Is it an **assertion**?

NOT SPECIFIC: This essay will show that the North American Free Trade agreement was a disaster for the furniture industry.

MORE SPECIFIC: Neither neo-protectionism nor post-industrial theory explains the downswing of the Canadian furniture industry in 1988-1994; data on productivity and profits, however, can be closely correlated with provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement that took effect in the same period.

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MORE THAN ONE MAIN IDEA: Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.

ONE MAIN IDEA: Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using Web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.

HINT: Use subordinating conjunctions (*because, since, so, although, unless, however*) to indicate that one idea is more important than another.

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NOT DISCUSSABLE: The current president of the United States was elected by only a relatively small majority.

DISCUSSABLE: After a long and difficult campaign, our current president was elected to his office by a relative small majority of the American public, a fact that points to a current trend in America toward a preference for moderation when it comes to party lines.

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NOT AN ASSERTION: In *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.

ASSERTION: Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that, to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature.