Writing a thesis statement

A thesis statement is a sentence (or sentences) that expresses the main idea(s) of your paper and answers the question(s) posed by your paper.

* **Thesis:** The United States' foreign policy reveals two significant patterns: the pursuit of oil and the avoidance of environmental responsibility.

An effective thesis has a definable, arguable claim and is a very specific statement that covers only what you want to discuss in your paper and that should be supported with specific evidence in the paper.

* **Thesis:** The fact that Columbia is a fast-growing population center is no excuse for unregulated development and urban sprawl.

A thesis statement generally consists of two parts: your topic, and then the analysis, explanation(s), or assertion(s) that you are making about the topic.

* **Thesis:** Poe's Gothic narrators ultimately become insane because they cannot distinguish between beauty and decay.
* **Topic:** Poe's Gothic narrators...
* **Assertion:** ...ultimately become insane because they cannot distinguish between beauty and decay.

**A thesis statement is not:**

* **A question**: Is the death penalty a good reflection of our society's ideology?
* **A list:** Personal success results from people skills, hard work, and persistence.
* **A vague/obvious assertion:** Most people would like to be happy.
* **A merely opinionated/combative assertion**: Only someone with a killer mentality could be against stem cell research.

Generally, a thesis statement appears at the beginning or end of the first paragraph of an essay so readers will have a clear idea of what to expect as they read.

As you write and revise your paper, it's okay to change your thesis statement — sometimes you don't discover what you really want to say about a topic until you've finished writing. Just make sure that your final thesis statement accurately shows what will happen in your paper.