Usually appearing in the introduction of an essay, a thesis statement expresses the main idea of the essay. It identifies the **topic** of the essay and it makes an **assertion** about that topic.

Topic + Assertion about the topic = Thesis

*Study abroad programs offer excellent learning opportunities.*
*The levee break changed both the geography and the demographics of the flooded areas.*

For the writer, the thesis is a blueprint to follow throughout the writing process. For the reader, the thesis is a road map telling the reader what’s to come.

**THE THESIS STATEMENT SHOULD SUIT THE KIND OF ESSAY YOU ARE WRITING.**

**THE EXPOSITORY THESIS:** The purpose of an **expository essay** is to explain something to the audience. The thesis statement of such an essay states something that the writer can **show or explain.**

- Most first-year students face many challenges, such as managing their time, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and making new friends.
- Community service is a great way for college students to learn about the local community.

**THE PERSUASIVE THESIS:** The purpose of an **argumentative or analytical essay** is to convince the audience of its claim, conclusion, proposition, proposal, evaluation, or interpretation. The thesis statement of such an essay states something that the writer can **prove** with evidence and analysis. It is a **debatable assertion** about the topic that might be challenged by a skeptical reader. Sometimes the counterargument is included in the thesis as a way of establishing the claim as a contestable one, as in two of the examples below.

- Community service should be made a graduation requirement for all college students.
- “Sonny’s Blues” presents a complex picture of drug use as a way to cope with sorrow and fear.
- Although many believe that the post-9/11 terror threat justifies extraordinary measures, the use of racial profiling to spot potential terrorists at our airports should not be practiced.
- Contrary to the way many readers perceive her, Austen’s protagonist Elizabeth Bennett is a weak female character.

**THE FORECASTING THESIS:** Common in academic papers is the thesis statement that identifies the topic, makes a claim about the topic, AND previews the major points or reasons that support the claim.

Topic + Assertion about the topic + Supporting points/reasons = Thesis

*Smith’s argument is weak because he omits known data, jumps to illogical conclusions, and talks down to his opponents.*

As in this example, this kind of thesis often takes the shape of a ‘because’ sentence. The main clause of the sentence states the claim of the thesis, while the parts following ‘because’ state the supporting reasons. But it need not take that form:

- Goodman’s vivid examples, lively metaphors, and engaging persona persuade the reader to agree with her point.
In Keats’s sonnet “On the Sea,” the poet uses imagery, personification, and hyperbole in order to impress upon the reader the ideal of the Romanticism movement of his time.

Changes in how the land is used for agriculture, in deforestation, and for landfills could alter the build-up of greenhouse gases.

**BASIC CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD THESIS:**

1. **It states something that the writer can show, explain, or prove. It is not a factual statement or an assertion so obvious that it doesn’t require support or justify discussion.**

   Fact: A growing number of children are overweight.
   
   Thesis: The growing problem of overweight youngsters can be addressed effectively through healthier school lunch menus.
   
   Too obvious: Lots of teens drive recklessly.
   
   Thesis: The high accident rate among teen drivers could be reduced with better driver training.

2. **It focuses on a single main idea and gives the reader a clear understanding of the essay’s purpose.**

   Confusing: Companies need to exploit the marketing potential of the Internet, and Web pages can provide both advertising and customer support.
   
   Clear: 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.

3. **It is neither too broad nor too narrow.**

   Too broad: Social networking sites have become very important in our lives.
   
   Better: Social networking sites have changed the ways in which we connect with friends and family.
   
   Too narrow: I love using posting on my blog.
   
   Better: Blogging lets users exercise their creativity and connect with others.

4. **It is specific.**

   Vague: Eating better will make you feel better.
   
   Specific: Adding more fresh fruit to your diet, while reducing fats and processed sugars, will help improve your general health.

5. **It is direct and confident.**

   Weak: In this essay, I will argue that tighter restrictions on assault weapons might help to reduce the murder rate.
   
   Strong: Tighter restrictions on assault weapons will reduce the murder rate.

[updated 4-30-10]