

In academic writing, a thesis statement is a sentence that expresses an essay's main idea. It is phrased as a declarative statement, not as a question, and it usually appears near the end of the essay's introduction. An essay's thesis statement serves the same purpose as a paragraph's topic sentence; just as a topic sentence states a paragraph's controlling idea, a thesis statement does the same for an essay, just on a larger scale.

The main functions of a thesis statement are to:

- Make a claim that is supported by evidence
- Unify a paper by showing how different topics are related to convey a specific point
- Forecast the content of the essay
- Create a basis for the outline and structure of the essay

Parts of a Thesis Statement

The thesis statement has **3 main parts**: the limited subject, the precise opinion, and the blueprint of reasons.

1. Limited Subject

Black Elk Speaks accurately represents Indian lifestyle through its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk.

The limited subject tells the reader exactly **on what, or whom the article focuses**. The book title (*Black Elk Speaks*), from the example, is the limited subject of the thesis statement:

Biographies of all types can teach us many things about the past. What was the culture like? What was the language like? And what did the people say? One such book is Black Elk Speaks, which tells the story of a Sioux warrior in the late 1800s. How accurate is this book? This paper will investigate the cultural details, the language, and what Black Elk actually said, in order to determine the answer.

The above sample starts off with a wordy, general statement about biographies. But the main topic isn't about biographies of all types, it's specifically about one book, Black Elk Speaks.

2. Precise Opinion

The precise opinion gives your **answer to a question** about the subject. A good **precise opinion is vital** to the reader's comprehension of the **goal of the essay**.

Black Elk Speaks *accurately represents* Indian lifestyle by its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk.

In order to demonstrate college-level thinking, your opinion should be non-obvious, and it should be possible for a reasonable person to disagree with you. There aren't many reasonable counter-arguments for claims like "Drug abuse is bad" or "The Nazi regime's execution of 6 million innocent Jews was horrible." That's because it's always wrong to "abuse" anything, and it's always wrong to execute the innocent.

Does *Black Elk Speaks* accurately represent Indian lifestyle?

A question is not an opinion. You may, of course, wish to argue that a particular question is unanswerable, or not even worth asking -- but that would still be an opinion that you

would have to back up just like any other opinion.

Black Elk Speaks *fails to represent* Indian lifestyle by its lack of attention to cultural detail, its misunderstanding of Indian words, and its lack of quotes from Black Elk himself.

*This precise opinion also tells how the author feels, yet it is completely opposite from the original example. **Either is acceptable**, as long as the rest of the essay supports the opinion.*

3. Blueprint of Reasons

A blueprint is a plan. It lets the builder know that the foyer will be here, the living room will be to the east, the dining room to the west, and the family room will be north.

The blueprint of an essay permits you to see the whole shape of your ideas before you start churning out whole paragraphs.

While it's okay for you to start writing down your ideas before you have a clear sense of your blueprint, your reader should never encounter a list of details without being told exactly what point these details are supposed to support. (See: [Blueprinting](#).)

Black Elk Speaks accurately represents Indian lifestyle by *its attention to cultural detail, its use of Indian words, and its direct quotes from Black Elk*.

In the blueprint, the author **signals an intention to support the precise opinion**. The author of the example above introduces three different kinds of evidence:

- cultural details
- Indian words
- quotes from Black Elk.

Informed by this blueprint, the reader expects to encounter one section (a paragraph or more) devoted to each subtopic.

The **blueprint determines the shape of your paper**.

If your thesis statement introduces three reasons, the reader will expect a section on reason 1, a section on reason 2, and a section on reason 3. For a single paragraph, you might only spend one sentence on each reason. For a 2-3 page paper, each reason might get its own paragraph. For a 10-page paper, each reason might contain its own local thesis statement, with its own list of reasons, so that each section involves several paragraphs.

To emphasize the structure of your essay, **repeat keywords or paraphrased ideas from the blueprint** as you introduce the sections in which you expand on each point. Crafting good transitions is a skill that takes time and practice