

The reader would then know that this was the topic you had chosen and would also know how you intended to approach this topic.

Note: This is not a three-point thesis statement. But the reader might expect a few reasons to be introduced immediately following the thesis in the form of a plan of development (POD).

EXERCISE

Writing Thesis Statements

Answer each of the following questions in the form of a thesis statement. Read each question carefully and underline the important words or phrases in it. Then formulate a thesis that is a one-sentence direct answer to the question. An example has been done for you.

Essay question: How does one learn another language?

Thesis statement: The process of learning another language is complicated, but usually follows four distinct stages.

1. Essay question: Should or should not the Canadian government support young artists?

Thesis statement:

2. Essay question: What is the value of being able to speak two languages in Canada?

Thesis statement:

3. Essay question: Is it harmful or beneficial to adopt a child from one culture and raise that child in another culture?

Thesis statement:

4. Essay question: In what ways can the Canadian government discourage people from smoking?

Thesis statement:

5. Essay question: Are some forms of advertising harmful, and, if so, should harmful advertising be banned?

Thesis statement:

The Introductory Paragraph

DEFINITION >

An **introduction** has a purpose that is two-fold: to “grab” your readers’ attention so that they will keep reading and to establish the thesis or your main idea. Often, in fact, without a thesis, there is no essay.

There is no one way to write an introduction. However, since many good introductions follow the same common patterns, you will find it helpful to look at a few examples of the more typical patterns to help you write your own introductions. In the following examples, most thesis statements are at the end.

1. Begin with a general subject that can be narrowed down to the specific topic of your essay. Here is an introductory paragraph on astronomy, from *Universe* by W.J. Kaufmann:

Speculation about the nature of the universe is one of the most characteristic human endeavours. The study of the stars transcends all boundaries of culture, geography, and politics. The modern science of astronomy carries an ancient tradition of observation and speculation, using the newest tools of technology and mathematics. In the most literal sense, astronomy is a universal subject—its subject is indeed the universe.

2. Begin with specifics (a brief anecdote, a specific example or fact) that will broaden into the more general topic of your essay. Here is the introduction to Miriam Waddington’s “The Hallowe’en Party,” an essay about a family of Russian Jews settling on a prairie farm just outside of Winnipeg:

The year that I was twelve, my father came home one day and announced that he had bought a farm. My sister Helen and I could hardly wait to see the farm which, according to my father, consisted of 26 acres in St. Vital, just beyond the outskirts of Winnipeg. There were 20 acres of bush with buildings, and six acres of meadow beside the river. My father had dreamed of such a farm all the years he was shut up in the dark greasy machine shop where he earned his living. Now as I look back, I can understand my father’s deep hunger for land.

3. Give a definition of the concept that will be discussed. Here is the introduction to "Man, Woman and Child," an essay by Lydia Bailey about the rising trend of single motherhood:

They are a new breed of mother—single, self-sufficient, and in their thirties. They have opted for motherhood without marriage. Some call it a return to tribal times when women raised children on their own with the help of other women. Others see it as a dangerous trend, labelling them as "the most narcissistic group of people you will ever see." Regardless of how it's perceived, statistics show that in the past few years, the number of single mothers in their thirties has increased dramatically.

4. Include a plan of development (a brief summary of points that will support your thesis statement) after your thesis statement.

Are you a *Law and Order* junkie? Well, if you are, you'll know that the State of New York has the death penalty. And it seems that it gets applied every now and again if the TV show is any indication. But in Canada, the death penalty was abolished, and it's time to bring it back. One reason to do so is the money that taxpayers will save by not having to maintain the lives of hardened criminals who will never be freed anyway. Secondly, there is no redemption for criminals who are sentenced to life in prison. And lastly, the punishment should fit the crime.

5. Start with an idea or statement that is a widely held point of view. Then surprise the reader by stating that this idea is false or that you hold a different point of view. Here is an example from "A Planet for the Taking," by David Suzuki:

Canadians live under the remarkable illusion that we are a technologically advanced people. Everything around us denies that assumption. We are, in many ways, a Third World country, selling our natural resources in exchange for the high technology of the industrialized world. Try going through your home and looking at the country of origin of your clothes, electrical appliances, books, car. The rare technological product that does have Canada stamped on it is usually from a branch plant of a multinational company centred in another country.

6. Start with a familiar quotation or a quotation by a famous person, as Frank Trippett does in this example from "Getting Dizzy by the Numbers":

"The very hairs of your head," says Matthew 10:30, "are all numbered." There is little reason to doubt it. Increasingly, everything tends to get numbered one way or another, everything that can be counted, measured, averaged, estimated or quantified. Intelligence is gauged by a quotient, the humidity by a ratio, pollen by its count, and the trends of birth, death, marriage and divorce by rates. In this epoch of runaway demographics, society is as often described and analyzed with statistics as

with words. Politics seems more and more a game played with percentages turned up by pollsters, and economics a learned babble of ciphers and indexes that few people can translate and apparently nobody can control. Modern civilization, in sum, has begun to resemble an interminable arithmetic class in which, as Carl Sandburg put it, "numbers fly like pigeons in and out of your head."

Where is the thesis statement in Trippett's introductory paragraph?

7. Give a number of descriptive images that will lead to the thesis of your essay. The descriptive images can make up the plan of development, which, in the case of this paragraph, *precedes* the thesis statement.

The nuclear family is breaking up. Both parents are working and children are left on their own for long periods of time, or are sent to daycare centres. Youngsters are learning about life from television and from movies, although the life that they learn about is often far removed from the truth. The incidence of crime is increasing among children because they receive little guidance and even less teaching on the difference between right and wrong. Social, moral, and religious values are declining. These are among the reasons why the fabric of society is decaying.

What Not to Say in Your Introduction

1. Avoid telling your reader that you are beginning your essay:

In this essay I will discuss ...

I will talk about ...

I am going to prove ...

2. Don't apologize:

Although I am not an expert ...

In my humble opinion ...

3. Do not refer to later parts of your essay:

By the end of this essay, you will agree ...

In the next paragraph, you will see ...

4. Don't use trite expressions. Since they have been so overused, they will lack interest. Using such expressions shows that you have not taken the time to use your own words to express your ideas. Some examples of trite expressions are

busy as a bee

you can't tell a book by its cover

haste makes waste

Using Transitions to Move from One Idea to the Next

Successful essays help the reader understand the logic of the writer's thinking by using transitional expressions when needed. Transitions usually occur when the writer is moving from one point to the next. They also occur whenever the idea is complicated. The writer may need to summarize the points covered thus far; the writer may need to emphasize a point already made; or the writer may want to repeat an important point. The transition may be a word, a phrase, a sentence, or even a paragraph.

Transitions are used to form links between paragraphs and the ideas in them in the same way that transitions are used to link ideas in a sentence or within a paragraph. Paragraphs are used to show a progression of ideas within an essay, a composition, or a research paper. Here are some of the transitional expressions you might use to help the reader make the right connections. Also refer to the chart on the inside back cover of this book and notice what other transitions could be used in the categories indicated below.

1. To make your points stand out clearly:

the first reason	second, secondly	finally
first of all	another example	most important
in the first place	even more important	all in all
	also, next	in conclusion
	then	to summarize

2. To present an example of what has just been said:

for example
for instance

3. To present the consequence of what has just been said:

therefore
as a result
then

4. To make a contrasting point clear:

on the other hand
but
contrary to current thinking
however

5. To admit a point:

of course
The same
granted + subject

6. To resume your argument after admitting a point:

nevertheless
even so
nonetheless
still

discourse markers

flag of direction

good for organization

7. To call the reader's attention to your organization:

Before attempting to answer these questions, let me ...

← In our discussion so far, we have seen that ...

At this point, it is necessary to ... *opposite idea*

It is beyond the scope of this paper to ...

A more subtle way to link one idea to another in an essay is to repeat a word or phrase from the preceding sentence.

instead of (for example)

I have many memories of my childhood in the Yukon. These *memories* include the aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends I left behind when I moved to Ontario.

Sometimes instead of the actual word, a pronoun will take the place of the word.

Like many Northerners, I've had to learn to adapt to an urban way of life. *It hasn't been easy, but today I almost think of myself as a Torontonian.*

do not start new idea with (it)

The Concluding Paragraph

A concluding paragraph has one main purpose: to give the reader the sense of reaching a satisfying ending to the topic discussed. Students often feel they have nothing to say at the end. A look at how professional writers frequently end their essays can ease your anxiety about writing an effective conclusion. You have more than one possibility; here are some of the most frequently used patterns for ending an essay.

1. Come full circle; that is, return to the material in your introduction. Finish what you started there. Remind the reader of the thesis. Be sure to restate the main idea using different wording. Here is an example from the essay "The Fatal Question," by Vivian Rakoff.

We are involved in an unending process of questioning and adaptation—an adaptation that, with luck, will not fall into a simple-minded rejection of the machine as the work of the devil. It is at least equally valid to see the manufacture of machines and goods as the continuous unfolding of human endowment in a cumulative history. Man the toolmaker is man expressing an ancient and important component of his true nature.