A thesis statement tells the reader what the essay is about. It predicts, controls, and obligates. It makes a claim that takes a side and needs to be proved. It should be the last sentence of the introductory paragraph.

**Elements of a thesis:**

- Topic
- Claim
- Unifying Element
- Subtopics (optional)

*A good thesis includes a unifying claim and may--or may not--include subtopics.*

A *unifying claim* is the overall assertion or idea of your thesis and of your paper, which you’ll back up with support and specific evidence in the body your essay.

Depending on the nature of the writing assignment, you may be asked to include specific subtopics in your thesis statement. *Subtopics* are smaller topics within your overall focus.

**Example:**

In order to create fear, Poe uses a variety of literary devices such as imagery, foreshadowing, and the narrator’s feelings.

- **Topic:** Effects of Poe’s writing technique
- **Unifying Element:** In order to create fear
- **Claim:** Poe uses a variety of literary devices
- **Subtopics:** Imagery, foreshadowing, narrator’s feelings.

**Thesis Statement Criteria:**

- It generates other thoughts.
- It predicts, controls, and obligates.
- It summarizes the whole essay in one sentence.
- It makes a unified claim that is *debatable* (readers may disagree) or *that needs to be proved* (readers need convincing)

**Thesis Statement “don’ts”:**

- A thesis cannot be a fragment; it must be expressed in a sentence.
  - NO: How life is in the Salem Housing project.
  - YES: Residents of the Salem Housing project tend to have higher disease rates than do any other residents of the greater New Canaan metropolitan area.
- A thesis typically should not be in the form of a question. (Often the answer to that question may function as the thesis.)
  - NO: Should eighteen-year olds have the right to vote?
  - YES: Anyone old enough to fight a war is old enough to vote.
- A thesis should not contain phrases such as "I think." (They weaken the statement.)
NO: Diane Feinstein and Pete Wilson may appear to be different, but in my opinion, they’re similar.
YES: To the unsuspecting voter, Diane Feinstein and Pete Wilson might seem to offer a choice in this year’s gubernatorial race. In fact, however, they take very similar stands on issues that affect our environmental standards—standards that will seriously influence the quality of life we, and our successor, will live.

- A thesis should not contain elements that are not clearly related.
  - NO: All novelists seek the truth; therefore, some novelists appear to be good psychologists.
  - YES: In their attempt to probe human nature, many novelists appear to be good psychologists.

- A thesis should not be expressed in vague language.
  - NO: Bad things have resulted from religion being taught in the classroom.
  - YES: Religion as a part of the school curriculum should be avoided because a person’s religious beliefs are highly personal and require individual commitment.

- A thesis should not be expressed in muddled or incoherent language.
  - NO: Homosexuality is a status offense because the participants are willing so that the relationship is voluntary in character unlike the type described in a victim-perpetrator model.
  - YES: When the participants in a homosexual act are consenting adults, then homosexuality should be classified as a status, not as a criminal offense.

- A thesis should not be written in overly figurative language.
  - NO: Religion is the phoenix bird of civilization.
  - YES: Our code of civil rights is founded upon religious principles.

Thesis Statement Rubric (Evaluate your thesis):

Criteria for a strong thesis statement:
___ The Thesis generates other thoughts
___ The thesis predicts, controls, and obligates
___ The thesis could summarize the content of an essay on the topic
___ The thesis proposes a unifying claim that is debatable or needs to be proved.

Avoiding “Thesis Don’ts”
___ The thesis is a complete sentence.
___ The thesis is a statement, and not a question.
___ The thesis avoids phrases such as “I think” and “I feel.”
___ The thesis uses specific language.
___ The thesis uses clear language.
___ The thesis avoids overly figurative language.