

NARRATOR: Thesis statements.

Readers can feel lost if a writer does not give clear directions about where their ideas are going and what the point is. Like a good map, a thesis statement tells readers the paper's topic and direction.

Imagine a writing assignment about a social issue for a general news magazine. It calls for an informative 8- to 10-page article that integrates five to eight sources. Here is a possible thesis. Public health concerns about viruses have changed air travel in positive and negative ways. The topic of this thesis statement is public health concerns about viruses. The direction is to compare and contrast the changes in air travel.

There are two main considerations for drafting a strong thesis statement. First, you will need to take into account your writing situation, making sure you have a good grasp of your paper's topic, audience, and purpose. Second, you will need your thesis statement to make a claim that is substantive, grounded, and assertive.

A good thesis keeps the writing situation in mind. Let's examine our sample thesis statement. A thesis should take on a topic that is manageable for a given word limit. Longer papers call for broader topics. Shorter papers require narrower topics.

The topic in our example thesis is public health concerns about viruses. This fairly broad topic fits an 8- to 10-page paper that uses five to eight sources. A broader topic-- all public health concerns-- would be much too broad for this assignment. A narrower topic-- public health concerns about the spread of the Ebola virus-- would work for a shorter assignment. Some initial research and an instructor conference can help you determine whether a topic is manageable for a given assignment.

A good thesis statement is also appropriate for the audience, real or imagined, that the paper is being written for. The assignment for this thesis statement was to write an article for a general news magazine. The thesis appears to be balanced in

content for this audience. A more specialized audience would require revising both the topic and purpose.

A good thesis also bears in mind the purpose of the assignment-- to inform, to entertain, or to persuade. This assignment asked for an informative comparison and contrast essay on a social issue, which the thesis clearly addresses. If the purpose were to entertain the audience, the thesis would take a different approach, such as a humorous personal observation. As much as I enjoy X-ray scanners and long lines at customs, these new air travel regulations are enough to make me surrender my passport. An argumentative thesis would set up a paper that takes a clear position on the issue and tries to persuade readers. Although inconvenient, public health concerns about viruses have changed air travel in positive ways.

Whatever the writing situation, a good thesis statement makes a claim that is substantive, grounded, and assertive. A substantive thesis makes an interesting and worthwhile claim. It is not bland or obvious, as is, there are many public health concerns about viruses. A grounded thesis makes a claim that can be supported with evidence and reasons. It is not too speculative or far-fetched, as in, in the future, viruses will no longer threaten public health. An assertive thesis also makes a clear direct claim. It is not too timid, as in, it seems to me that public health concerns about airline travel may have had some effects. Nor is an assertive thesis too polarizing, as in, any red-blooded American knows that public health concerns about viruses have totally ruined air travel forever.

Remember, thesis statements tell readers the topic and direction of your paper. A strong thesis statement considers topic, audience, and purpose, and is substantive, grounded, and assertive.