

Writing Center
Workshop Handout: Thesis Statements

A thesis statement has two parts: a **limited subject** and a **controlling idea**. The limited subject tells your reader what you will write about, while your controlling idea is what you will say about it.

Limiting Your Subject

Having a subject that is too big will lead to general statements that do not satisfy your reader. Ask yourself, “What is important? What is not important?” When you ask, “What will I write about the general subject?” your answer should be a specific topic called the limited subject.

General Subject	Limited Subject
Environment	The effects of global warming
Fashion	Dressing professionally for work
Television	Advertisements for children

Crafting Your Controlling Idea

Once you have a limited subject, you need to tell the reader your opinion on that limited subject. Your opinion on the limited subject is your *controlling idea*. Your job when writing a controlling idea is to persuade the reader that your point is valid and/or reasonable. **Everything else you write in your paper will defend your controlling idea.**

Limited Subject	Controlling Idea	Thesis Statement
The effects of global warming	The effects of global warming will impact the foods people eat	Although global warming has many negative effects, the impact on food availability will be the most severe.
Dressing professionally for work	Dressing professionally for work is important to getting respect	Dressing professionally at work means appearing clean and neat, being organized, and having a non-distracting hairstyle.
Advertisements for children	Advertisements unfairly influence children	Advertisements convince children to want toys, food, and other items that could be dangerous for their health.

Your thesis statement is a one sentence declaration of the argument you will present about your limited subject.

Thesis statement = Limited subject + Controlling idea

Identify the limited subject and controlling idea in each of these thesis statements:

1. Track maintenance on the CTA Brown Line should be done in the middle of the night instead of during the day.
2. Spending more money on protecting the environment will decrease the country's health care costs in the long term.
3. People who throw cigarette butts on the ground should be fined for littering.

Dos and Don'ts of Thesis Statements

What a Thesis Statement Isn't

- A title
 - *Title:* Divorce over Nothing
 - *Thesis:* Too many people divorce for no good reason.
- An announcement of the subject
 - *Announcement:* In this paper I will write about why people get divorced.
 - *Thesis:* Of all the reasons why people get divorced, substance abuse is the most preventable.
- A fact
 - *Fact:* Fifty percent of people get divorced.
 - *Thesis:* Our divorce rates are so high because people get married when they aren't ready for commitment.

What a Thesis Statement Is

- Expresses a **clear opinion** about the limited topic
 - *Poor:* Divorce can be dangerous.
 - *Stronger:* Divorce is dangerous for children because they will not understand healthy romantic relationships.
- Discusses **one major idea**
 - *Poor:* Divorce is popular because people like to quit when things are difficult and people don't take the time to understand each other.
 - *Stronger:* Divorce is popular because it is too easy to obtain a divorce in many states.
- Discusses the major idea **specifically** (your thesis must be defensible in a multi-paragraph essay)
 - *Poor:* Divorce is negative.
 - *Stronger:* Divorce is harmful to us all because the family is the building block of society.

