What’s the Big Idea?

What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is a sentence or series of sentences that tell the reader what the piece of writing is about, what it will accomplish, or what it will prove.

Great, but what makes a Thesis Statement?

In order to successfully craft a thesis statement you must:

1. Make an assertion about a topic, issue, or work of art/literature,
2. Clearly and succinctly describe the issue or topic,
3. Provide context for the issue—why should we care about it?
4. Provide a brief description of how your research backs up your assertion.

What does a good Thesis Statement look like?

The following, from Blau & Burak’s *Writing in the Works* is an example of a strong Thesis Statement (the entire thesis is developed over two paragraphs, but shortened here):

“Today less than 45 percent of US undergraduates are men, down from 55 percent in 1970, according to national surveys... The increasing dominance of female students in American higher education is particularly striking because they represent just 49 percent of the population between the ages of 18 and 24.”
What is a Research Question?

A research question asks something about a particular topic or issue. Rather than picking a side, it is an honest, open-minded attempt to learn more about a topic before you take a particular position on any one aspect of your topic.

But how do I formulate a Research Question?

Once you have your basic topic, come up with something you want to know about that topic. Then state it as a question. You now have a research question.

Example (from Writing in the Works): Someone researching the phenomenon of exercise addiction might ask, “What causes addictive behaviors?”

Is that it?

Of course not! As you progress in your research, your research question might change depending on how much information you can find and how interesting it is. Or you might have more than one research question, which help you investigate and then bring together two related topics. For example, in the exercise addiction question above, you might also add, “Why do people exercise?”

What’s next?

After you have formulated a research question, RESEARCH! Your question might change, but that’s ok. As you progress in your research, start to formulate your thesis statement. Remember, your thesis statement and research question will not be the same! Each has a specific function and place in your research process.

Where can I get help?

The Writing Lab—more information at libraryguides.medaille.edu/tutoring

Writing in the Works, by Blau & Burak, available in both the Rochester Campus Library and Rochester Writing Lab

Other writing books available in Buffalo & Rochester Campus Libraries—ask a librarian!