

WRITING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Given now what you know from the “What is a Thesis Statement” article, how do you write a clear, focused and directive thesis statement for different kinds of written compositions? Let’s here consider thesis statements in writing academic research papers.

Academic Research Papers

Research papers are part of legitimate college and university success, but few students enjoy them until they are finished. Some people’s lack of enjoyment in writing research papers is likely due to their heavy demands on research time, critical thinking skills, and good quality writing. There is quite a difference between poor, fair, and excellently composed research papers, and that difference is very obvious to the intelligent reader. Excellent research papers require much work, time and skill.¹

Writing requirements for a research paper vary depending on the school and instructor, the assignment purpose, and the research paper’s thesis statement.² If you are writing a research paper from its inception and/or are responsible for the paper’s thesis statement, you should also read the “How to research a Thesis Statement” article.

In an academic research paper, the writer’s intent is usually to inform concerning a topic, to evaluate data and draw conclusions, or to persuade the reader toward a certain viewpoint. In any case, a good quality research paper is an involved analysis. The one thesis statement that guides the entire paper will not be successful without solid research evidence and a soundly written argument to support it.³ All these features make the effective thesis statement crucially important and difficult to write well. Therefore, the most effective and accurate version of the thesis statement might not appear until the final edited version of the paper.

A valid and effective research paper thesis statement need not accomplish more than one purpose unless so instructed. Most research papers, regardless of length and amount of work involved, have a very small audience of readers. Consequently, the thesis statement need not specify every purpose it will serve, but it should reveal any purpose that is not obvious or requested by the final reader.

The thesis statement must be general enough to incorporate the contents of the entire paper in a nutshell. However, the statement must in turn be specific enough to give the reader clear and focused direction for the entire paper. Therefore, a good quality research paper thesis statement might require several revisions by the time the paper is completed. If the research for the paper reveals that the original thesis statement is simply wrong, the writer must replace the statement with a new and valid one that good quality research supports.

What does a research paper Thesis Statement look like?

Consider this example of an actual thesis statement quoted from a university seminary project⁴ :

It is therefore the thesis of this study that the intimate relationship between God the Father, Jesus Christ, and human followers as described in John 15:1-17 serves as an intentional means to accomplish the primary goal of divine glorification.

Strengths of this Thesis Statement

Note in the example above that the thesis statement is unavoidably clear. The statement uses the academic third person “he/she/it” perspective, which is best for most research papers. A definite need for research is suggested by the topic of study being interpretation of a specific concept (a Biblical text). The statement is original and creative; yet also ventures to inform the reader because the proposed topic is not obvious to the reader. The statement ventures to persuade the reader to the particular interpretation it proposes. The statement, in this case, does not need to state a desire to evaluate data because that purpose is made very clear in the project’s instructions given by the final reader.

Weaknesses of this Thesis Statement

The example thesis statement shown above is weak in that it does not reveal one of the writer’s intentions. That is, in the course of the project paper, the writer attempts to motivate the reader(s) to action. Such motivation is sincere but not obvious to or requested by the reader; yet the thesis statement gives no indication of an intention to motivate to action. In addition, the thesis statement is wordy (contains unnecessary words).

Revised Thesis Statement

If the omission of the writer’s intention to motivate readers and the wordiness are corrected, the thesis statement would be accurately improved like so:

This study reveals how the intimate relationship between Father God, Jesus Christ, and human followers in John 15:1-17 serves as a means to accomplish the primary goal of divine glorification and to inspire this goal in modern followers.

Summary of Key Points

The research paper thesis statement...

1. is general enough to be concise and contain entire research paper.
2. is specific enough to be clear and guiding for entire paper.
3. may have more than one purpose for the paper.
4. should express any purpose that is not obvious to or requested by the final reader.

5. is useless if good quality research does not support it.
6. might have to be revised or replaced by the time the paper is finished.
7. normally will use the third person “he/she/it” perspective.

¹ Hacker, Diana (2006). *The Bedford handbook* (7th ed.). Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martins, contains much advice relevant to writing academic research papers in general and for various formats. See especially: pp. 24-25, 31-38, 53, 56-60, 97, 178-179, 492-493, 527-790.

² The considerations for academic research papers are very much the same as those for clinical case studies. For purposes of keeping this article to an effective length, clinical case studies are covered in a separate article.

³ A well-researched and written research paper is scholarly and could run from 10 to 40 pages or more. Many academic scholarly, professional and clinical journal articles and conference papers are in essence well-written research papers. In a scholarly book of essays, each chapter is in effect its own academic research paper.

⁴ Atkins, T. R. (2006). *That he might be glorified in us: A study of John 15:1-17*. Unpublished master’s thesis, Regent University School of Divinity, Virginia Beach, Virginia, United States, p. 4.