

## RESEARCHING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Given what you know from the “What is a Thesis Statement” article, let us consider in this article some useful guidelines on how to research your thesis statement.<sup>1</sup> Please note that this article assumes you have already read other pertinent articles on writing your thesis statement.

While any composition’s thesis statement could be researched, in the college and university context of academic writing, it is most likely that in-depth research papers, case studies, theses, or dissertations are those compositions that will receive extensive research. These kinds of compositions are more lengthy and weighty in content and structure. Nevertheless, any composition can succeed or fail based on the clarity, integrity, and design of its thesis statement. The improperly researched thesis statement will not be clear, integral, and well-designed to guide the entire composition. The thesis statement need not be exhaustively researched.<sup>2</sup> It needs to be researched effectively, integrally, and sufficiently for the type and depth of the composition.

The entire written composition is contained within and behind the thesis statement. In academic writing, the goal for researching the thesis statement is to valuably support the ideas proposed in the composition that call for support or verification from other writers or speakers. Thus good quality research is required to validate the thesis statement. Yet there is no single standard method to follow to accomplish this necessary research.

The research procedure offered here as follows is useful and effective for the academic and/or novice writer, though not the only method possible.

### *Thesis Statement accomplished in Stages*

The vast majority of academic writing assignments or projects that demand research will provide the writer with a topic (vague or specific) but not an initial or final thesis statement.

#### *Stage One: Thesis Idea to First (Initial) Written Statement*

The writing topic (vague or specific) is here called the “thesis idea.” The writer begins to research information on his/her thesis idea. Good quality supportive research takes time. The use here of a fictional writing example will aid in understanding.

***Fictional Example:*** To start, I must clarify my thesis idea I want to look for by research. Suppose my composition topic is **the question whether heaven and hell truly exist or whether they are simply religious myths**. This question, or debate, is not itself my thesis statement. What angle on this topic will I take in my paper?

The topic is too broad, as most academic writing topics are, and must be more focused to allow me to research it sensibly. Researching a thesis idea that is unnecessarily broad is a waste of my time because I will find much more information than I can use. There are a variety of

things I can do with this broad thesis idea to help me focus it in my research. Essentially I can choose between two approaches:

- (1) Research the thesis idea for awhile and see what specific points of the topic receive the most scholarly discussion. Then focus my thesis idea onto one of those much discussed points.<sup>3</sup>
- (2) Speculate a specific point about my topic that I would like to investigate and discuss. Then do my research for awhile and see what kind of scholarly discussion exists for and against my specific point. If there is sufficient enough source material in favor of my specific point, then I can proceed with it.

After using one or both of these research techniques, suppose I discover that quite a bit of scholarly source material exists which attempts to prove the existence of heaven and/or hell without using the Bible at all. I think this non-Biblical approach to heaven and hell is intriguing to investigate and write about. This approach seems specific and valid enough that I can attempt my first (initial) written thesis statement, like so:

**There is evidence and argument that heaven and hell do truly exist, and this evidence does not depend on the Bible's statements.**

This initial thesis statement gives me a clear direction I want to pursue in my research and composition. I wrote this initial statement simply by summarizing in one sentence the interesting specific issue I found in my initial research. Still, it gives me direction and some focus. My initial thesis statement is vague enough that it contains my entire rough draft paper in one sentence, but it is specific enough that I have a definite point to research and explain.

### *Stage Two: First (Initial) Written Statement to Second (Final) Written Statement*

Now that I have an effective initial thesis statement for my composition, I complete all of my necessary research and examination. That takes time. While I am doing my research I am thinking over my thesis statement to see how I can refine it even more specifically. What do I want to write about my thesis statement issue? How might I divide the issue or thesis statement into several parts to create sections of my paper? At some point in my research and available time for writing, I must decide that I have in-hand my final thesis statement that I will place in my final draft composition.

*Fictional Example-- continued:* I did a lot of research on my first (initial) thesis statement. I considered and weighed the quality of research materials I found. Suppose I found several ways without using the Bible that I could argue that, yes, heaven and hell really exist. However, I need to refine my thesis statement more, because I do not have time or space in my paper to examine the several arguments I found. Thus I will focus my attention on just one argument. Which one? I choose the one argument on which I find the most scholarly source materials that support or

analyze what I want to explain. Suppose then, the one most productive argument I find on which to focus my paper entails the evidence in favor of heaven and hell found in death-bed dreams and visions of certain dying people.

Since I decide to focus my paper on this one argument of death-bed experiences, I can change and revise my second (or final) thesis statement like so:

**There is valid evidence and argument entirely apart from the Bible that heaven and hell truly exist, and such evidence is best reflected in confirmed death-bed experiences.**

Note that this thesis statement is more well-defined, and it accomplishes its purpose in one clear concise sentence. Thus it is easier to research and explain in the space of my paper. This thesis statement can be successful as my final thesis statement. It is vague enough that it in essence contains everything my paper says. Yet the statement is specific enough that my paper can give it sufficiently focused attention via research that will not take me a wastefully long time to complete.

Note also this second (or final) thesis statement offers to **inform** the reader by telling about the specific topic from its angle. The thesis statement also **evaluates** for the reader by offering the evidence as “valid” and “confirmed.” The thesis statement also tries to **persuade** the reader by saying there is “best” evidence, and that evidence serves as “argument.”

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<sup>1</sup> Compare especially relevant comments in: Hacker, Diana (2006). *The Bedford handbook* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martins, pp. 528-554, 587-591.

<sup>2</sup> In today’s information technological society, “information overload” of sources is a problem in academic research, not a lack of sources. The writer must be wise and discerning for good quality sources to use. Many sources are not scholarly or trustworthy for academic writing. In most academic writing, exhaustive in-depth research is not even necessary. The issue of good versus poor sources of information is not within the scope of this article.

<sup>3</sup> This strategy does not commonly apply to dissertations.