

PLACING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

Given now what you know from reading the “What is a Thesis Statement” article, how do you determine what is the best location for your thesis statement within the composition you are writing? This article seeks to answer that question.

Thesis Statements, Genre, and Location

In actuality, the very existence of a clearly expressed thesis statement or its precise location within a written composition depends upon the genre (type) of the composition. Different genres possess different precise purposes. College and university students’ writing assignments and papers entail a different purpose than a professional author writing a novel or an office manager composing a company-wide email or a school teacher compiling a committee report. Varieties of use and location of thesis statements can be seen even in various books of the Bible. Very skilled writers know how to successfully place a thesis statement anywhere (beginning, middle or end) in the composition.

Academic writing is almost a genre of its own, for it purposes primarily to have the student learn certain things from completing the assignment or paper. For the student, academic writing is assigned more to instruct than to make the composition enduring or influential. Consequently, it is most effective and efficient in academic writing to design the thesis statement and place it in the beginning section (often called the introduction) of the composition. Placing the thesis statement in the “introduction” is most effective and efficient because it quickly informs and guides the reader (often an instructor) concerning the student’s writing goal and strategy.¹ Placing the thesis statement at the opening of the composition enables the academic reader/instructor to evaluate the composition more accurately and to discern more quickly part of what the student has evidently learned.

However, placing the thesis statement as the very first sentence of an academic composition is often too abrupt for the reader. In certain kinds of academic writing, a first sentence thesis statement can be effective and efficient, as in a discussion board post or email.

Example Thesis Statement Placement

Consider a couple fun examples in the Bible. The best Biblical illustrations of the advice given above are seen in Luke’s writings in the New Testament:

Example 1: Luke 1:1-4

¹ Many people have set out to write accounts about the events that have been fulfilled among us. ² They used the eyewitness reports circulating among us from the early disciples. ³ Having carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I also have decided to write a careful account for you, most honorable Theophilus, ⁴ so you can be certain of the truth of everything you were taught. (New Living Translation)

Luke's fundamental thesis statement for his lengthy Gospel is here highlighted. Notice that this paragraph is the introduction to the Gospel. The first two sentences of explanation very logically lead the reader into the thesis statement. The thesis statement is placed as the final sentence of a short introduction, contains in one sentence the content of the entire Gospel, and in this case is written in the first person "I/we" and second person "you/your" perspective.

Example 2: Acts 1:1-11

¹ In my first book I told you, Theophilus, about everything Jesus began to do and teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven after giving his chosen apostles further instructions through the Holy Spirit.

³ During the forty days after his crucifixion, he appeared to the apostles from time to time, and he proved to them in many ways that he was actually alive. And he talked to them about the Kingdom of God. ⁴ Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. ⁵ John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

⁶ So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, "Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?" ⁷ He replied, "The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere-- in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

⁹ After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. ¹⁰ As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. ¹¹ "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!" (New Living Translation)

This passage appears to be Luke's introduction to the Book of Acts, which is lengthy. Interpretively, this introduction consists of four paragraphs and ends with v. 11. Verse 8 is commonly accepted as the thesis statement for the entire Book of Acts²; so it is here highlighted.

Notice that the first paragraph gets the reader's (Theophilus') attention and rapport. The second and third paragraphs provide due explanation leading logically and smoothly into the thesis statement at v. 8. The thesis statement ends the third paragraph. The fourth paragraph serves to vividly end the introduction and transition into the rest of the book.

Lastly, note that this thesis statement (v. 8) is written in the third person "he/she/it" perspective, even though the first paragraph is different. The thesis statement is correctly in the third person because Luke ingeniously uses a verbatim quotation from Jesus as his thesis.

¹ For comments relevant to writing good quality introductions and thesis statements, see: Hacker, Diana (2006). *The Bedford handbook* (7th ed.). Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martins, pp. 24-25, 31-37, 53, 97, 492-493, 589-590, 674-676.

² Kümmel, Werner G. (1975). *Introduction to the New Testament* (Rev. ed.). (C.K. Howard, Trans.). Nashville: Abingdon Press. (17th ed. published 1973), p. 155.