

# The Thesis Statement

**T**he famous American author Thomas Wolfe had a simple formula for beginning his writing: “Just put a sheet of paper in the typewriter and start bleeding.” For some writers, the “bleeding” method works well. You may find that, indeed, you are one of those writers who must begin by freewriting or by writing an entire “discovery draft”\* to find your purpose and focus—you must write yourself into your topic, so to speak. Other writers are more structured; they may prefer prewriting in lists, outlines, or cubes. Sometimes writers begin certain projects by composing one way, whereas other kinds of writing tasks profit from another method. There is no right or wrong way to find a topic or to begin writing; simply try to find the methods that work best for you.

Let’s assume at this point that you have identified a topic you wish to write about—perhaps you found it by working through one of the prewriting activities mentioned in Chapter 1 or by writing in your journal. Perhaps you had an important idea you have been wanting to write about for some time, or perhaps the assignment in your class suggested the topic to you. Suppose that through one of these avenues you have focused on a topic and you have given some thought to a possible audience for your paper. You may now find it helpful to formulate a *working thesis*.

## What Is a Thesis? What Does a “Working Thesis” Do?

The thesis statement declares the main point or controlling idea of your entire essay. Frequently located near the beginning of a short essay, the thesis answers these questions: “What is the subject of this essay?” “What is the writer’s opinion on this subject?” “What is the writer’s purpose in this essay?” (to explain something? to argue a position? to move people to action? to entertain?).

\* ♦ If you do begin with a discovery draft, you may wish to turn at this point to the manuscript suggestions on pages 97–99 in Chapter 5.

Consider a “working thesis” a statement of your main point in its trial or rough-draft form. Allow it to “work” for you as you move from prewriting through drafts and revision. Your working thesis may begin as a very simple sentence. For example, one of the freewriting exercises on nature in Chapter 1 (pages 8–9) might lead to a working thesis such as “Our college needs an on-campus recycling center.” Such a working thesis states an opinion about the subject (the need for a center) and suggests what the essay will do (give arguments for building such a center). Similarly, the prewriting list on running (page 7) might lead to a working thesis such as “Before beginning a successful program, novice runners must learn a series of warm-up and cool-down exercises.” This statement not only tells the writer’s opinion and purpose (the value of the exercises) but also indicates an audience (novice runners).

A working thesis statement can be your most valuable organizational tool. Once you have thought about your essay’s main point and purpose, you can begin to draft your paper to accomplish your goals. *Everything in your essay should support your thesis.* Consequently, if you write your working thesis statement at the top of your first draft and refer to it often, your chances of drifting away from your purpose should be reduced.

## Can a “Working Thesis” Change?

It’s important for you to know at this point that there may be a difference between the working thesis that appears in your rough drafts and your final thesis. As you begin drafting, you may have one main idea in mind that surfaced from your prewriting activities. But as you write, you may discover that what you really want to write about is different. Perhaps you discover that one particular part of your essay is really what you want to concentrate on (instead of covering three or four problems you have with your current job, for instance, you decide you want to explore in depth only the difficulties with your boss), or perhaps in the course of writing you find another approach to your subject more satisfying or persuasive (explaining how employees may avoid problems with a particular kind of difficult boss instead of describing various kinds of difficult bosses in your field).

Changing directions is not uncommon: *writing is an act of discovery*. Frequently we don’t know exactly what we think or what we want to say until we write it. A working thesis appears in your early drafts to help you focus and organize your essay; don’t feel it’s carved in stone.

A warning comes with this advice, however. If you do write yourself into another essay—that is, if you discover as you write that you are finding a better topic or main point to make—consider this piece of writing a “discovery draft,” extended prewriting that has helped you find your real focus. Occasionally, your direction changes so slightly that you can rework or expand your thesis to accommodate your new ideas. But more frequently you may find that it’s necessary to begin another draft with your newly discovered working thesis as the controlling idea. When this is the case, don’t be discouraged—this kind of “reseeing” or revision of your topic is a common practice among experienced writers (◆ for more advice on revising as rethinking, see Chapter 5). Don’t be tempted at this point to leave your original thesis in an essay that has clearly changed its point, purpose, or approach—in other words, don’t try to pass off an old head on the body of a new statue! Remember that ultimately you want your

thesis to guide your readers rather than confuse them by promising an essay they can't find as they read on.

## Guidelines for Writing a Good Thesis

To help you draft your thesis statement, here is some advice:

**A good thesis states the writer's clearly defined opinion on some subject.** You must tell your reader what you think. Don't dodge the issue; present your opinion specifically and precisely. For example, if you were asked to write a thesis statement expressing your position on the national law that designates twenty-one as the legal minimum age to purchase or consume alcohol, the first three theses listed here would be confusing:

- Poor** Many people have different opinions on whether people under twenty-one should be permitted to drink alcohol, and I agree with some of them. [The writer's opinion on the issue is not clear to the reader.]
- Poor** The question of whether we need a national law governing the minimum age to drink alcohol is a controversial issue in many states. [This statement might introduce the thesis, but the writer has still avoided stating a clear opinion on the issue.]
- Poor** I want to give my opinion on the national law that sets twenty-one as the legal age to drink alcohol and the reasons I feel this way. [What is the writer's opinion? The reader still doesn't know.]
- Better** To reduce the number of highway fatalities, our country needs to enforce the national law that designates twenty-one as the legal minimum age to purchase and consume alcohol. [The writer clearly states an opinion that will be supported in the essay.]
- Better** The legal minimum age for purchasing alcohol should be eighteen rather than twenty-one. [Again, the writer has asserted a clear position on the issue that will be argued in the essay.]

If you want to write about a personal experience but are finding it difficult to clearly define your thesis idea, try asking yourself questions about the topic's significance or value. (Examples: Why is this topic important to me? What was so valuable about my year on the newspaper staff? What was the most significant lesson I learned? What was an unexpected result of this experience?). Often the answer to one of your questions will show you the way to a working thesis. (Example: Writing for the school newspaper teaches time-management skills that are valuable both in and out of class).

**A good thesis asserts one main idea.** Many essays drift into confusion because the writer is trying to explain or argue two different, large issues in one essay. You can't effectively ride two horses at once; pick one main idea and explain or argue it in convincing detail.

- Poor** The proposed no-smoking ordinance in our town will violate a number of our citizens' civil rights, and no one has proved that secondhand smoke is dangerous anyway. [This thesis contains two main assertions—the ordinance's

violation of rights and secondhand smoke's lack of danger—that require two different kinds of supporting evidence.]

- Better** The proposed no-smoking ordinance in our town will violate our civil rights. [This essay will show the various ways the ordinance will infringe on personal liberties.]
- Better** The most recent U.S. Health Department studies claiming that secondhand smoke is dangerous to nonsmokers are based on faulty research. [This essay will also focus on one issue: the validity of the studies on secondhand smoke danger.]
- Poor** High school athletes shouldn't have to maintain a "B" or better grade-point average in all subjects to participate in school sports, and the value of sports for some students is often overlooked. [Again, this thesis moves in two different directions.]
- Better** High school athletes shouldn't have to maintain a "B" or better grade-point average in all subjects to participate in school sports. [This essay will focus on one issue: reasons why a particular average shouldn't be required.]
- Better** For some students, participation in sports may be more valuable than achieving a "B" grade-point average in all subjects. [This essay will argue that the benefits of sports sometimes outweigh those of elective classes.]

Incidentally, at this point you may recall from your high school days a rule about always expressing your thesis in one sentence. Writing teachers often insist on this rule to help you avoid the double-assertion problem just illustrated. Although not all essays have one-sentence theses, many do, and it's a good habit to strive for in this early stage of your writing.

**A good thesis has something worthwhile to say.** Although it's true that almost any subject can be made interesting with the right treatment, some subjects are more predictable and therefore more boring than others. Before you write your thesis, think hard about your subject: does your position lend itself to stale or overly obvious ideas? For example, most readers would find the following theses tiresome unless the writers had some original method of developing their essays:

- Poor** Dogs have always been man's best friends. [This essay might be full of ho-hum clichés about dogs' faithfulness to their owners.]
- Poor** Friendship is a wonderful thing. [Again, watch out for tired truisms that restate the obvious.]
- Poor** The food in my dorm is horrible. [Although this essay might be enlivened by some vividly repulsive imagery, the subject itself is ancient.]

Frequently in composition classes you will be asked to write about yourself; after all, you are the world's authority on that subject, and you have many significant interests to talk about whose subject matter will naturally intrigue your readers. However, some topics you might consider writing about may not necessarily appeal to other readers because the material is simply too personal or restricted to be of general interest. In these cases, it often helps to *universalize* the essay's thesis so your readers can also identify with or learn something about the general subject, while learning something about you at the same time:

- Poor** The four children in my family have completely different personalities. [This statement may be true, but would anyone other than the children's parents really be fascinated by this topic?]
- Better** Birth order can influence children's personalities in startling ways. [The writer is wiser to offer this controversial statement, which is of more interest to readers than the preceding one because many readers have brothers and sisters of their own. The writer can then illustrate her claims with examples from her own family, and from other families, if she wishes.]
- Poor** I don't like to take courses that are held in big lecture classes at this school. [Why should your reader care one way or another about your class preference?]
- Better** Large lecture classes provide a poor environment for the student who learns best through interaction with both teachers and peers. [This thesis will allow the writer to present personal examples that the reader may identify with or challenge, without writing an essay that is exclusively personal.]

In other words, try to select a subject that will interest, amuse, challenge, persuade, or enlighten your readers. If your subject itself is commonplace, find a unique approach or an unusual, perhaps even controversial, point of view. If your subject is personal, ask yourself if the topic alone will be sufficiently interesting to readers; if not, think about universalizing the thesis to include your audience. Remember that a good thesis should encourage readers to read on with enthusiasm rather than invite groans of "Not this again" or shrugs of "So what?"

**A good thesis is limited to fit the assignment.** Your thesis should show that you've narrowed your subject matter to an appropriate size for your essay. Don't allow your thesis to promise more of a discussion than you can adequately deliver in a short essay. You want an in-depth treatment of your subject, not a superficial one. Certainly you may take on important issues in your essays; don't feel you must limit your topics to local or personal subjects. But one simply cannot refight the Vietnam War or effectively defend U.S. foreign policy in Central America in five to eight paragraphs. Focus your essay on an important part of a broader subject that interests you. (◆ For a review of ways to narrow and focus your subject, see pages 6–18.)

- Poor** Nuclear power should be banned as an energy source in this country. [Can the writer give the broad subject of nuclear power a fair treatment in three to five pages?]
- Better** Because of its poor safety record during the past two years, the Collin County nuclear power plant should be closed. [This writer could probably argue this focused thesis in a short essay.]
- Poor** The parking permit system at this college should be completely revised. [An essay calling for the revision of the parking permit system would involve discussion of permits for various kinds of students, faculty, administrators, staff, visitors, delivery personnel, disabled people, and so forth. Therefore, the thesis is probably too broad for a short essay.]
- Better** Because of the complicated application process, the parking permit system at this college penalizes disabled students. [This thesis is focused on a particular problem and could be argued in a short paper.]

- Poor** African American artists have always contributed a lot to many kinds of American culture. [“African American artists,” “many kinds,” “a lot,” and “culture” cover more ground than can be dealt with in one short essay.]
- Better** Scott Joplin was a major influence in the development of the uniquely American music called ragtime. [This thesis is more specifically defined.]

**A good thesis is clearly stated in specific terms.** More than anything, a vague thesis reflects lack of clarity in the writer’s mind and almost inevitably leads to an essay that talks around the subject but never makes a coherent point. Try to avoid words whose meanings are imprecise and those that depend largely on personal interpretation, such as “interesting,” “good,” and “bad.”

- Poor** The women’s movement is good for our country. [What group does the writer refer to? How is it good? For whom?]
- Better** The Colorado Women’s Party is working to ensure the benefits of equal pay for equal work for both males and females in our state. [This tells who will benefit and how—clearly defining the thesis.]
- Poor** Registration is a big hassle. [No clear idea is communicated here. How much trouble is a “hassle”?]
- Better** Registration’s alphabetical fee-paying system is inefficient. [The issue is specified.]
- Poor** Living in an apartment for the first time can teach you many things about taking care of yourself. [“Things” and “taking care of yourself” are both too vague. What specific ideas does the writer want to discuss? And who is the “you” the writer has in mind?]
- Better** By living in an apartment, a first-year student can learn valuable lessons in financial planning and time management. [The thesis is now clearly defined and directed.]

**A good thesis is easily recognized as the main idea and is often located in the first or second paragraph.** Many students are hesitant to spell out a thesis at the beginning of an essay. To quote one student, “I feel as if I’m giving everything away.” Although you may feel uncomfortable “giving away” the main point so soon, the alternative of waiting until the last page to present your thesis can seriously weaken your essay.

Without an assertion of what you are trying to prove,

To avoid feeling swamped as you gather your prewriting thoughts, craft a working thesis to help steer you through your first draft.



*The Great Wave at Kanagawa, 1831, by Katsushika Hokusai*

Image copyright © The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, NY



your reader does not know how to assess the supporting details your essay presents. For example, if your roommate comes home one afternoon and points out that the roof on your apartment leaks, the rent is too high, and the closet space is too small, you may agree but you may also be confused. Does your roommate want you to call the owner or is this merely a gripe session? How should you respond? On the other hand, if your roommate first announces that he wants the two of you to look for a new place, you can put the discussion of the roof, rent, and closets into its proper context and react accordingly. Similarly, you write an essay to have a specific effect on your readers. You will have a better chance of producing this effect if readers easily and quickly understand what you are trying to do.

Granted, some essays whose position is unmistakably obvious from the outset can get by with a strongly *implied thesis*, and it's true that some essays, often those written by professional writers, are organized to build dramatically to a climax. But if you are an inexperienced writer, the best choice at this point still may be a direct statement of your main idea. It is, after all, your responsibility to make your purpose clear, with as little expense of time and energy on the readers' part as possible. Readers should not be forced to puzzle out your essay's main point—it's your job to tell them.

Remember: An essay is not a detective story, so don't keep your readers in suspense until the last minute. Until you feel comfortable with more sophisticated patterns of organization, plan to put your clearly worded thesis statement near the beginning of your essay.

## Avoiding Common Errors in Thesis Statements

Here are five mistakes to avoid when forming your thesis statements:

1. Don't make your thesis merely an announcement of your subject matter or a description of your intentions. State an attitude toward the subject.
 

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Poor</b>   | The subject of this essay is my experience with a pet boa constrictor. [This is an announcement of the subject, not a thesis.]                                       |
| <b>Poor</b>   | I'm going to discuss boa constrictors as pets. [This represents a statement of intention but not a thesis.]  |
| <b>Better</b> | Boa constrictors do not make healthy indoor pets. [The writer states an opinion that will be explained and defended in the essay.]                                   |
| <b>Better</b> | My pet boa constrictor, Sir Pent, was a much better bodyguard than my dog, Fang. [The writer states an opinion that will be explained and illustrated in the essay.] |
2. Don't clutter your thesis with such expressions as "in my opinion," "I believe," and "in this essay I'll argue that. . . ." These unnecessary phrases weaken your thesis statement because they often make you sound timid or uncertain. This is your essay; therefore, the opinions expressed are obviously yours. Be forceful: speak directly, with conviction.
 

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <b>Poor</b> | My opinion is that the federal government should devote more money to solar energy research.    |
| <b>Poor</b> | My thesis states that the federal government should devote more money to solar energy research. |

**Better** The federal government should devote more money to solar energy research.

**Poor** In this essay I will present lots of reasons why horse racing should be abolished in Texas.

**Better** Horse racing should be abolished in Texas.

3. Don't be unreasonable. Making irrational or oversimplified claims will not persuade your reader that you have a thorough understanding of the issue. Don't insult any reader; avoid irresponsible charges, name-calling, and profanity.

**Poor** Radical religious fanatics across the nation are trying to impose their right-wing views by censoring high school library books. [Words such as "radical," "fanatics," "right-wing," and "censoring" will antagonize many readers immediately.]

**Better** Only local school board members—not religious leaders or parents—should decide which books high school libraries should order.

**Poor** Too many corrupt books in our high school libraries selected by liberal, atheistic educators are undermining the morals of our youth. [Again, some readers will be offended.]

**Better** To ensure that high school libraries contain books that reflect community standards, parents should have a voice in selecting new titles.

4. Don't merely state a fact. A thesis is an assertion of opinion that leads to discussion. Don't select an idea that is self-evident or dead-ended.

**Poor** Child abuse is a terrible problem. [Yes, of course, who wouldn't agree that child abuse is terrible?]

**Better** Child-abuse laws in this state are too lenient for repeat offenders. [This thesis will lead to a discussion in which supporting arguments and evidence will be presented.]

**Poor** Advertisers often use attractive models in their ads to sell products. [True, but rather obvious. How could this essay be turned into something more than a list describing one ad after another?]

**Better** A number of liquor advertisers, well known for using pictures of attractive models to sell their products, are now using special graphics to send subliminal messages to their readers. [This claim is controversial and will require persuasive supporting evidence.]

**Better** Although long criticized for its negative portrayal of women in television commercials, the auto industry is just as often guilty of stereotyping men as brainless idiots unable to make a decision. [This thesis makes a point that may lead to an interesting discussion.]

5. Don't express your thesis in the form of a question unless the answer is already obvious to the reader.

**Poor** Why should every college student be required to take two years of foreign language?

**Better** Chemistry majors should be exempt from the foreign-language requirement.



**REMEMBER:** Many times writers “discover” a better thesis near the end of their first draft. That’s fine—consider that draft a prewriting or focusing exercise and begin another draft, using the newly discovered thesis as a starting point.

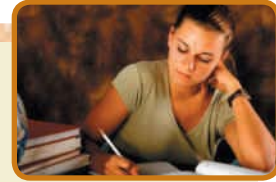
### PRACTICING WHAT YOU’VE LEARNED

A. Identify each of the following thesis statements as adequate or inadequate. If the thesis is weak or insufficient in some way, explain the problem.

1. I think *Schindler’s List* is a really interesting movie that everyone should see.
2. Which cars are designed better, Japanese imports or those made in the United States?
3. Some people think that the state lottery is a bad way to raise money for parks.
4. My essay will tell you how to apply for a college loan with the least amount of trouble.
5. During the fall term, final examinations should be given before Winter Break, not after the holidays as they are now.
6. Raising the cost of tuition will be a terrible burden on the students and won’t do anything to improve the quality of education at this school.
7. I can’t stand to even look at people who are into body piercing, especially in their face.
8. The passage of the newly proposed health-care bill for the elderly will lead to socialized medicine in this country.
9. People over seventy-five should be required to renew their driver’s licenses every year.
10. Having a close friend you can talk to is very important.

B. Rewrite the following sentences so that each one is a clear thesis statement. Be prepared to explain why you changed the sentences as you did.

1. Applying for a job can be a negative experience.
2. There are many advantages and disadvantages to the county’s new voting machines.



© Canstock Images, Inc./  
Index Stock Imagery

*continued on next page*

3. Buying baseball tickets online is one big headache.
4. In this paper I will debate the pros and cons of the controversial motorcycle helmet law.
5. We need to do something about the billboard clutter on the main highway into town.
6. The insurance laws in this country need to be rewritten.
7. Bicycle riding is my favorite exercise because it's so good for me.
8. In my opinion, Santa Barbara is a fantastic place.
9. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had a tremendous effect on this country.
10. All my friends like the band Thriving Ivory, and it's too bad they don't play more venues around here.

### ASSIGNMENT

Narrow the subject and write one good thesis sentence for five of the following topics:

1. A political or social issue
2. College or high school
3. Family
4. A hobby or pastime
5. A recent book or movie
6. Vacations
7. An environmental issue
8. A current fad or fashion
9. A job or profession
10. A rule, law, or regulation



© CORBIS

### Using the Essay Map\*

Many thesis sentences will benefit from the addition of an *essay map*, a brief statement in the introductory paragraph introducing the major points to be discussed in the essay.

---

\*I am indebted to Susan Wittig for this useful concept, introduced in *Steps to Structure: An Introduction to Composition and Rhetoric* (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop Publishers, 1975), pages 125–126.

Consider the analogy of beginning a trip by checking your map to see where you are headed. Similarly, an essay map allows the readers to know in advance where you, the writer, will be taking them in the essay.

Let's suppose you have been assigned the task of praising or criticizing some aspect of your campus. You decide that your thesis will be "The Study Skills Center is an excellent place for first-year students to receive help with basic courses." Although your thesis does take a stand ("excellent place"), your reader will not know why the Center is helpful or what points you will cover in your argument. With an essay map added, the reader will have a brief but specific idea where the essay is going and how it will be developed:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>Thesis</p> <p>Essay map<br/>(underlined)</p> | <p>The Study Skills Center is an excellent place for first-year students to receive help with basic courses. <u>The Center's numerous free services, well-trained tutors, and variety of supplementary learning materials can often mean the difference between academic success and failure for many students.</u></p> |
|---|---|

Thanks to the essay map, the reader knows that the essay will discuss the Center's free services, tutors, and learning materials.

Here's another example—this time let's assume you have been frustrated trying to read books your teacher has placed "on reserve" in your campus library, so you have decided to criticize your library's reserve facility:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Thesis</p> <p>Essay map<br/>(underlined)</p> | <p>The library's reserve facility is badly managed. <u>Its unpredictable hours, poor staffing, and inadequate space discourage even the most dedicated students.</u></p> |
|---|--|

After reading the introductory paragraph, the reader knows the essay will discuss the reserve facility's problematic hours, staff, and space. In other words, the thesis statement defines the main purpose of your essay, and the essay map indicates the route you will take to accomplish that purpose.

The essay map often follows the thesis, but it can also appear before it. It is, in fact, frequently part of the thesis statement itself, as illustrated in the following examples:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>Thesis with<br/>underlined essay<br/>map</p> | <p><u>Because of its free services, well-trained tutors, and useful learning aids,</u> the Study Skills Center is an excellent place for students seeking academic help.</p>   |
| <p>Thesis with<br/>underlined essay<br/>map</p> | <p>For those students who need extra help with their basic courses, the Study Skills Center is one of the best resources <u>because of its numerous free services, well-trained tutors, and variety of useful learning aids.</u></p> |
| <p>Thesis with<br/>underlined essay<br/>map</p> | <p><u>Unreasonable hours, poor staffing, and inadequate space</u> make the library reserve facility difficult to use.</p>  |

In addition to suggesting the main points of the essay, the map provides two other benefits. It will provide a set of guidelines for organizing your essay, and it will help keep you from wandering off into areas only vaguely related to your thesis. A clearly written thesis statement and essay map provide a skeletal outline for the sequence of paragraphs in your essay, frequently with one body paragraph devoted to each main point mentioned in your map. (Chapter 3, on paragraphs, will explain in more detail the relationships

among the thesis, the map, and the body of your essay.) Note that the number of points in the essay map may vary, although three or four may be the number found most often in 500-to-800-word essays. (◆ More than four main points in a short essay might result in underdeveloped paragraphs; see pages 59–63 for additional information.)

Some important advice: although essay maps can be helpful to both writers and readers, they can also sound too mechanical, repetitive, or obvious. If you choose to use a map, always strive to blend it with your thesis as smoothly as possible.

- Poor** The Study Skills Center is a helpful place for three reasons. The reasons are its free services, good tutors, and lots of learning materials.
- Better** Numerous free services, well-trained tutors, and a variety of useful learning aids make the Study Skills Center a valuable campus resource.

If you feel your essay map is too obvious or mechanical, try using it only in your rough drafts to help you organize your essay. Once you're sure it isn't necessary to clarify your thesis or to guide your reader, consider dropping it from your final draft.

## PRACTICING WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

A. Identify the thesis and the essay map in the following sentences by underlining the map.

1. *Citizen Kane* deserves to appear on a list of "Top Movies of All Time" because of its excellent ensemble acting, its fast-paced script, and its innovative editing.
2. Our state should double the existing fines for first-offense drunk drivers. Such a move would lower the number of accidents, cut the costs of insurance, and increase the state revenues for highway maintenance.
3. To guarantee sound construction, lower costs, and personalized design, more people should consider building their own log cabin home.
4. Apartment living is preferable to dorm living because it's cheaper, quieter, and more luxurious.
5. Not everyone can become an astronaut. To qualify, a person must have intelligence, determination, and training.
6. Through unscrupulous uses of propaganda and secret assassination squads, Hitler was able to take control of an economically depressed Germany.
7. Because it builds muscles, increases circulation, and burns harmful fatty tissue, weightlifting is a sport that benefits the entire body.
8. The new tax bill will not radically reform the loophole-riddled revenue system: deductions on secondary residences will remain, real estate tax



© Canstock Images, Inc./  
Index Stock Imagery

shelters will be untouched, and nonprofit health organizations will be taxed.

9. Avocados make excellent plants for children. They're inexpensive to buy, easy to root, quick to sprout, and fun to grow.
  10. His spirit of protest and clever phrasing blended into unusual musical arrangements have made Bob Dylan a recording giant for more than forty years.
- B.** Review the thesis statements you wrote for the Assignment on page 40. Write an essay map for each thesis statement. You may place the map before or after the thesis, or you may make it part of the thesis itself. Identify which part is the thesis and which is the essay map by underlining the map.
- C.** *Collaborative Activity:* Write a thesis sentence with an essay map for an essay you might write for this or another class. Exchange your work with that of a classmate and, drawing on the advice of this chapter, reconfirm strengths you see as well as offering suggestions for revision.

## ASSIGNMENT

Use one of the following quotations to help you think of a subject for an essay of your own. Don't merely repeat the quotation itself as your thesis statement but, rather, allow the quotation to lead you to your subject and a main point of your own creation that is appropriately narrowed and focused. Don't forget to designate an audience for your essay, a group of readers who need or want to hear what you have to say.

1. "Opportunity is missed by most people because it is often dressed in overalls and looks like work."—Thomas Edison, inventor
2. "Sports do not build character. They reveal it."—Heywood Hale Broun, sportscaster
3. "The world is a book and those who don't travel read only a page."—St. Augustine, cleric

Jackie Robinson stealing home plate during the 1955 World Series



continued on next page



© CORBIS

© Bettmann/CORBIS

4. "It is never too late to be what one might have been."—George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans), writer
5. "Noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good."—Martin Luther King, Jr., statesman and civil-rights activist
6. "When a thing is funny, search it carefully for a hidden truth."—George Bernard Shaw, writer
7. "I am a great believer in luck, and I find the harder I work the more I have of it."—Stephen Leacock, economist and humorist
8. "It is never too late to give up your prejudices."—Henry Thoreau, writer and naturalist
9. "When an old person dies, a library burns to the ground."—African proverb
10. "In this world there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants, and the other is getting it."—Oscar Wilde, writer
11. "Education is the most powerful weapon. You can use it to change the world."—Nelson Mandela, anti-apartheid activist and former President of South Africa
12. "The journey is the reward."—Taoist proverb
13. "You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation."—Plato, philosopher
14. "Nobody can make you feel inferior without your consent."—Eleanor Roosevelt, stateswoman
15. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."—Margaret Mead, anthropologist
16. "If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow."—Chinese proverb
17. "Let your hook be always cast; in the pool where you least expect it, there will be a fish."—Ovid, Roman poet
18. "Even if you are on the right track, you will get run over if you just sit there."—Will Rogers, humorist and writer
19. "No matter what accomplishments you make, somebody helps you."—Althea Gibson, tennis champion
20. "The rope of a lie is short."—Syrian proverb



21. “Pearls lie not on the seashore. If thou desirest one, thou must dive for it.”—Chinese proverb
22. “I took the [road] less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.”  
—from “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost, poet (◆ For the complete poem, see pages 481–482.)



© Elke Walford/Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

*Early Snow*, ca. 1827, by Caspar David Friedrich

## Chapter 2 Summary

Here's a brief review of what you need to know about the thesis statement:

1. A thesis statement declares the main point of your essay; it tells the reader what clearly defined opinion you hold.
2. Everything in your essay should support your thesis statement.
3. A good thesis statement asserts one main idea, narrowed to fit the assignment, and is stated in clear, specific terms.
4. A good thesis statement makes a reasonable claim about a topic that is of interest to its readers as well as to its writer.
5. The thesis statement is often presented near the beginning of the essay, frequently in the first or second paragraph, or is so strongly implied that readers cannot miss the writer's main point.
6. A "working" or trial thesis is an excellent organizing tool to use as you begin drafting because it can help you decide which ideas to include.
7. Because writing is an act of discovery, you may write yourself into a better thesis statement by the end of your first draft. Don't hesitate to begin a new draft with the new thesis statement.
8. Some writers may profit from using an essay map, a brief statement accompanying the thesis that introduces the supporting points discussed in the body of the essay.