A thesis statement is a sentence or two that identifies the main idea(s) of your paper. It also often contains a list of topics in the order in which they are discussed in your paper. In this way, the thesis serves as a road map to the rest of the document. That is why it often appears at the end of your introduction—so it can prepare the reader for what's to come.

Though the thesis should appear near the beginning of your paper, you may not know what your thesis is when you first start writing. Or you may write a thesis statement early on, and then realize later that the focus of your paper has changed. That's perfectly fine: just make sure you revise your thesis statement afterward so that it accurately reflects the content of your paper.

See the *Essay Organization* handout for more information on how a thesis statement connects to the rest of the paper.

Thesis statements can also differ depending on the type of assignment. See below for examples.

Descriptive/Explanatory

Sometimes you are simply asked research a subject and present your main findings, without offering any critical analysis or engaging with any controversial ideas. A thesis statement for this type of assignment should (1) identify your topic and (2) list the main features or characteristics you will discuss.

> e.g. This paper explores the IRA's status as a terrorist organization by examining its members' motivations, its combat tactics, and its recent political activities.

> e.g. Hobbes believes that even though the state holds an extreme amount of control, people still have inalienable liberties that are protected through the law of nature and the conditional silence of the law. (**Note:** Even though this paper is discussing a philosophical argument, it is only *describing* Hobbes' argument: it is not assessing or critiquing his argument in any way, or presenting the student's own argument about Hobbes. For this reason, it is descriptive, not argumentative.)

Cause and Effect

Theses for this type of assignment may list reasons, causes, purposes, results, effects, benefits, advantages, disadvantages, pros or cons—but they don't usually take the next step of arguing for or against something based on these reasons or effects.

> e.g. There are several reasons why Aboriginal people in Canada have lower confidence in the police, including the history of colonization, the use of racial profiling, overrepresentation of Aboriginals in the prison system, and lack of cultural sensitivity among members of the police force.

> e.g. Tourism in Hoi An, Vitenam, has resulted in many benefits for the local community, such as economic gains and improved infrastructure electricity and roads. However, it has also led to increased living costs and the pollution of local waterways.

> e.g. Higher suicide rates in the countries of Guyana, South Korea, and Sri Lanka can be attributed to limited access to psychiatric treatment, stigma against mental illness, and intense poverty, respectively.

Compare/Contrast

This type of thesis statement mentions similarities and/or differences between two or more things, and often identifies specific points of comparison and contrast.

> e.g. In this paper I will outline the differences between justifiable homicide and criminal homicide, and further distinguish manslaughter from murder.

> e.g. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* mirrors many aspects of Hemingway's own life, such as his travel to Tanzania, his relationship with his wife, his experiences as a writer, and even his own early demise.

Problem/Solution

These theses pose a question or describe a problem, and may also offer solutions.

> e.g. Despite its many benefits, older adults face many barriers to adopting technology, including age-related challenges (i.e. natural physical and cognitive declines), attitude barriers (e.g. lack of interest, security concerns), and ability barriers (e.g. lack of technical skills). However, these barriers can be overcome by better tech design and proper training programs for seniors.

> e.g. The purpose of this literature review is to determine whether Spontaneous Trait Inferences are simply descriptive (i.e. summarize observed behaviour) or causal (i.e. explain and can therefore predict behaviour).

> e.g. This study will investigate whether adopted individuals are more likely to be insecure in romantic relationships.

Argumentative

For these papers, you are asked to adopt a position on an issue and provide reasons in support of your position. You are not just describing a topic: you are offering a unique perspective, taking a stance on a controversial or debatable issue, judging or critically evaluating something.

> e.g. Though it contains provisions to protect vulnerable persons, the *Medical Assistance in Dying* legislation gives unequal access to medically assisted death because it excludes patients whose conditions cause intense suffering but are not terminal (such as those with Parkinson's disease), and it rejects the use of advanced directives.

> e.g. In its aggressive anti-union tactics, Wal-Mart infringes on its workers' basic human rights by interfering with their right to form and join trade unions, the right to peaceful assembly and association, and the right to just and favourable remuneration.

> e.g. The Wife of Bath contradicts many gender norms as she is outspoken, has power over her husbands, is not maternal, has good business sense, and is an authority on pilgrimage.

> e.g. While the DSM is widely used in the field of psychology, there are many problems with it. It is a form of cultural imperialism, it pathologizes psychological differences, and it is influenced by the pharmaceutical industry.