

Thesis Statement Development by Formula

Thesis statements follow patterns, and can be represented by formulae.

Example thesis statement 1

This statement is for a description essay about how to write an academic paper:

An academic paper requires organization, adequate research or attention to subject matter, and expression in conventional English; however, without the author's deep understanding of the topic, the essay falls flat.

This thesis might be represented by the following formula:

P (an academic paper) = R (research), S (subject), E (expression), and U (understanding).

P = R, S, E and U.

Example thesis statement 2

In this example, the thesis is for an argument essay about the importance of art to society:

The homoerotic art of Robert Mapplethorpe deserves to be exhibited at public expense even though most people find it offensive.

This thesis might be represented by the following formula:

A (art) = P (public funding) even though O (offensive).

A = P even though O.

Example thesis statement 3

This example was developed in response to the question "Are prisons a necessary evil?":

Though considered barbaric and inhumane by some, prisons remain necessary to our society because they grant justifiable retribution for victims, act as a deterrent, offer protection for society and provide opportunities for rehabilitation.

This thesis might be represented by the following formula:

P (prison) = N (necessary), because R (retribution), D (deterrent), P (protection), and R (rehabilitation).

Because of the repetition of letters in this example, this formula might be more clearly represented as:

P = N, because 1, 2, 3, 4.

Seeing that thesis statements can be represented by formulae, now you can reverse the procedure by starting with a formula in order to begin developing a thesis statement. One of the most common formulae for thesis statements, and, therefore, a good starting point for thesis development, is:

X = Y, because 1, 2, 3.

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The Process

Imagine you've been asked to write a research essay about fad diets. You decide that you will focus on the negative aspects of fad diets, so you might set up the following formula:

Fad diets = N (negative)

You need to add some details about why fad diets are negative, but before doing much research, you might not know precisely what those details are. So, you might add letters to represent the variables, or reasons, why fad diets are negative.

Fad diets = N because X, Y, and Z.

Now, as you do your research on the topic of fad diets, your reading has a focus. You're not just reading randomly about the general topic of fad diets, but, instead, you're reading specifically searching for reasons why fad diets are negative. Your research will go faster and be more productive.

As you read, you may decide to narrow the topic further by choosing to focus on a particular fad diet; for example, you might choose the "South Beach" diet. Now your thesis statement reads:

The South Beach diet = N because X, Y, and Z.

As your research proceeds further, you might discover some particular, negative aspects of the South Beach diet that will now fill in for the X, Y, Z you worked with earlier.

X = deprives the body of essential vitamins and minerals

Y = reflects unhealthy cultural demand for easy/fast solutions to problems

Z = often unsuccessful in terms of long-term weight loss

Now your thesis statement reads:

The South Beach diet = N because it deprives the body of essential vitamins and minerals, because it reflects unhealthy cultural demand for easy/fast solutions to problems, and because it is often unsuccessful in terms of long-term weight loss.

As a final step, you might replace N with "dangerous" or "disadvantageous" or even "ill-advised".

The South Beach diet is ill-advised because it deprives the body of essential vitamins and minerals, because it reflects unhealthy cultural demand for easy/fast solutions to problems, and because it is often unsuccessful in terms of long-term weight loss.

Other Examples of Theses expressed as formulae

Below are three examples which all focus on the same topic—air pollution.

Example 1

Air pollution has had a dramatic effect on the lives of twentieth-century North Americans in terms of smoking regulations, antipollution devices, industrial control, health effects (asthma).

A = E in terms of R, D, C and H

Example 2

Air pollution has been a primary cause of numerous health-related problems, including lung cancer, respiratory disease, increased infant mortality, cardiovascular disease, and death rates among the elderly.

A = P including L, R, M, C and D

Example 3

Air pollution may create a greenhouse effect, severely altering our environment and producing drastic climatic changes.

A = G → E and C

Fill-in-the-blank method

If you don't like the algebraic formula style, try using blanks, as in the following examples:

- 1) Although most readers of _____ have argued that _____, closer examination shows that _____.
- 2) _____ uses _____ and _____ to prove that _____.
- 3) Phenomenon X is a result of the combination of _____, _____, and _____.