

How to Develop a Thesis Statement*

1. Begin with your subject matter.
2. Narrow it down.
3. Decide on which feature or attribute of your subject you want to explore.
4. Create an intriguing sentence or question to let readers know which direction you are taking your essay.

Example

1. Subject matter: volcanoes

2. Narrow it down: See the 3 examples below.

Volcanoes that have changed history | Predicting volcanic activity | Mount Vesuvius in Italy



3. Decide on a feature or element:

I want to show my readers how some important volcanic eruptions have actually changed history.

I want to show my readers the methods scientists use to predict volcanic eruptions. I'm also interested in how people through the ages have predicted volcanic activity without the help of modern technology.

I wonder what we learned about everyday life because of the weirdness of a whole town being encased in volcanic ash during the Mount Vesuvius eruption in A. D. 79.



4. Create a fitting thesis statement:

The course of history was actually changed by these three volcanic eruptions.

Using modern technology or other methods, is it possible to predict when a volcano will erupt?

Though it was a tragic event, the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A. D. 79 has given us a chance to know what life was like in Pompeii, Italy.

*Note: A thesis statement is also called the *controlling idea* or the *main idea*.

Exercise I for 7th-8th grade

Now you try it. You will not be writing any of these essays. You are simply practicing the art of writing a thesis statement.

Example Subject: George Washington

Narrowed down: the war years

Feature or element: I want to show my readers that what they learn as a child or teen may be helpful in adulthood, using George Washington's life as an example.

Main idea (thesis statement): What George Washington learned as a young boy helped him to be a better leader during the American Revolution.



1. Subject matter: Vacations
2. Narrowed down:
3. Feature or element you want to convey:
4. Main idea (thesis statement):



Try it one more time.

1. Subject matter: the sun
2. Narrowed down:
3. Feature or element you want to focus in on:
4. Main idea (thesis statement):

Exercise 1 for teens

Now you try it. You will not be writing any of these essays. You are simply practicing the art of writing a thesis statement.

- 1.** Subject matter: Choose your own subject matter or use any one of these: snakes, cotton, garbage, drivers' licenses, dogs, college, Captain America, Wonder Woman, babysitting, TV reality shows, church, credit cards.

Write your choice of subject matter here:

- 2.** Narrow it down:
- 3.** Decide on a feature or element of it you want to share with your readers:
- 4.** Develop a thesis statement:

See the next page for another exercise.

Exercise 2 for teens

1. Subject matter: Your choice (something you have strong feelings about or are greatly interested in).
Write your choice here:

2. Narrow it down to three possibilities:

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3. Decide on one feature or element for each possibility:



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4. Develop a thesis statement for each:



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Some of the material in this tutorial/worksheet is taken from these courses available from Writing with Sharon Watson: [Jump In](#) and [The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School](#).

