

How to Develop an Effective Thesis Statement

In short, an effective EE thesis statement is one that answers your EE question. This is why we spend so much time on your EE question. Without a good question, your thesis—your answer to the question—is bound to be weak or irrelevant. Your thesis statement’s quality can ultimately be measured by a few essential qualities listed below.

A. Relevance

The main aim or goal of any thesis statement is to shed light upon and contribute to your field of study. It should be significant to answer the “so what?” question but recognize its limitations to a 3500-4000 word essay. You’re not going to cure cancer or unveil lost sea scrolls in this paper, so be realistic in your approach. Generally, if your thesis can explore the unknown, reject the status quo, or give a fresh or creative perspective on your topic of study, you will have a relevant thesis statement. Again, though, this quality is largely dependent on your original question that you discussed with your supervisor and on your particular subject matter.

B. Clarity

Even if your thesis statement is relevant, it is possible for it to be poorly written. Your thesis statement must use very clear, specific, unambiguous words and terminology; therefore, every word must be scrutinized carefully. Oftentimes, students believe they know the meaning of a word or term but in actuality are using terminology that is not accurate to what they are describing. Even the slightest misuse of a word may completely alter the direction of your paper.

Next, consider your diction. Yes, we want to have a distinguished vocabulary in our writing, but we don’t want to complicate what’s simple. The examples below should point out the obvious problems with sounding too formal:

“The biota exhibited a one hundred percent mortality response.”
“All the fish died.”

Seriously, no matter how impressed you might be with yourself had you constructed the first sentence, your evaluator wants to read the second. Trust me.

Finally, students oftentimes are redundant in their thesis statements, using the same language multiple times. This usually takes the form of repetitive adjectives, nouns, and decorative but useless adverbs that distract the reader from the actual thesis. Being clear means being concise and also not repeating yourself. So, don’t repeat yourself. Avoid superfluous redundancy.

C. Tone

Take a look at the following thesis statement: “Welfare payments, perhaps more than anything, are eroding personal initiative.”

Though on initial inspection, this thesis may appear just fine to many students, it is a trap that should be avoided because it serves a great lesson in the importance of tone, your attitude toward your subject. As a writer, beware of extreme thesis statements using “all or none” thinking, black-and-white logic. You do not want to wall yourself off from counterarguments; as an IB student, your job is to embrace the other-half intellectually and openly. Avoid absolutes unless you have the raw data to support it, and even then, be careful in your wording. Even if the thesis above is your accurate conclusion, this one will come across much better to an evaluator:

“Despite their immediate benefits, welfare payments may actually be eroding personal initiative and depriving society of needed workers.”

In this revised thesis, the student wisely introduces the counterarguments with the opening phrase, “Despite their immediate benefits,” which also gives the reader an indication of the organization of the essay (it is now justifiable and logical to discuss the immediate benefits of welfare payments.) The verb “may be” acknowledges the objective fact that “personal initiative” can never be measured quantitatively and that continued studies should be done in order to confirm the writer’s claim. Any tone of arrogance or close-mindedness from the first thesis statement is now replaced with a feeling that the writer will treat the topic fairly, weighing the benefits and drawbacks of both sides.

The irony in developing the tone to one’s thesis statement is this: the harder or more rigid a line you draw, the more difficult burden you place on yourself to prove your point, not easier. In essence, your data collection will either speak for itself or it won’t. But speaking in rigid absolutes only works on the weak-minded. Doing so here will actually put higher-level thinkers in a “devil’s advocate” role when reading your paper. You don’t want that.

D. Form

Finally, your thesis must be formed according to the organizationally strategy of your paper. Two examples:

- Compare-contrasts may merit a two-sided statement with a dependent clause: “While /Even though this, then this.”
- Arguments of category merit categorical lists: “The reasons X occurred include A, B, C, but most importantly D.”

If you discuss with your supervisor these four elements of your thesis, you should be fine.