

Thesis Statements

Someone has said that pornography is hard to define, but that you know it when you see it! Although this may be an absurd analogy, many people would agree that you could say the same

thing about a thesis statement: it is hard to define, but when you have a strong thesis statement it is very evident. Because a thesis guides your paper, a strong thesis statement can make the difference between a solid essay and a weaker one. That why one of the first things we focus on at the Writing Center is your thesis statement. Oftentimes, we find that you have one, but that it could be strengthened. The following definitions and examples may help you to evaluate your thesis statement.

What is a thesis?

Simply put, a thesis tells the reader what issues, or topics, you are going to address in your paper. It may often include the context for these ideas and a specific list of points you will make.

Other definitions include:

A thesis is a sentence, or sentences, that defines and debats the rest of the paper.

The following is not a very strong thesis:

In his novel Bless Me Ultima, Rudolfo Anaya raises many religious issues.

Note that this statement suggests a general topic but does not narrow the topic very much. You

could be more specific by saying:

The events in Rudolfo Anaya's novel Bless Me Ultima cause the main character to question God. Who is God? Is God good? What is evil? Who should he believe in?

Next, consider how the following thesis paragraph helps identify the context, gives some specifics, and suggest the significance of the ideas that the paper will cover:

In Rudolfo Anaya's novel Bless Me Ultima, the main character, Tony, is torn between his mother's wish for him to become a priest and his father's wish for him to be a vaquero. These different wishes for his identity also reflect his parents' different religious perspectives. Whereas Tony's mother is a traditional Catholic, Tony's father is a Catholic, but also acknowledges folk religious customs and wisdom. Because traditional Catholicism teaches Tony he can only believe in "one God" he is torn between his parents' beliefs. His mind is full of questions about God: Is there more than one God. Is God all-powerful? Is God just? Why can't the priests heal someone and a folk healer can? Tony comes to some resolution on these issues through the help of the character Ultima who is a curandera, or "healer." Through Ultima's teachings we see Anaya's challenge to traditional teachings of the Christian Church, and we see Anaya suggesting the need for a more holistic or inclusive view of religion. Although this may seem like a simplistic story of a boy growing up, this novel raises some fairly radical ideas.

Notice that now this is more than a topic: it includes specific examples of the kinds of religious questions the novel covers. It also includes a summary of the conclusions the writer draws: "Anaya suggests the need for a holistic or inclusive view of religion."