

## WRITING a THESIS STATEMENT

A thesis statement is a statement of the position you will take about your essay / dissertation / research paper.

It states the main supporting topics and acknowledges opposing arguments.

Academic legal writing will often require you to develop arguments and discuss issues using your own ideas. Essay questions, for example, will use instructing words such as *analyse*, *critically evaluate*, *discuss*, *to what extent* - to show that you have to put forward arguments to support a point of view. Sometimes the argument is implied in the title, for example: *Seminars are the most effective way of learning for law students*. This statement is a debatable subject where you have to put forward ideas both for and against *seminars* as a learning tool.

Before you begin to discuss both sides of an argument, you need to consider your own viewpoint i.e. whether you agree or disagree with the main idea and why.

This viewpoint is **the position** (the stance) you intend to take about the topic. You will state this position in a **thesis statement**. Your thesis is your idea(s) about the topic which you believe in, but which other people may disagree with. The aim of your writing is to convince the reader of the correctness of your stated position, i.e. your argument(s), and the flaws in the opposing arguments. Your essay / dissertation / research paper provides evidence **for** your thesis (position) statement and **against** it with opposing arguments. This is easy for a law student to picture because it is very similar to what the prosecution and defense do in a court of law – as they present the evidence for and against a case.



**Example:** *Seminars are the most effective way of learning for law students. Discuss*

**Thesis statement:** *It is suggested that seminars offer more benefits to law students than lectures, tutorials or private study in terms of opportunities to learn by exchanging knowledge and ideas.*

### Arguments for

✓ **Seminars are beneficial because:**

- 1 Everyone can have the opportunity to talk which benefits unconfident students
- 2 Students can listen and take notes on other people's ideas
- 3 Pre-seminar reading and research introduce new concepts to students to discuss in the seminar

### Arguments against

X **Seminars are a waste of time:**

- 1 Too many people in a group can prevent communication
- 2 Tutor may speak too fast
- 3 Preparation for the seminar can take a long time

## How to take a well-reasoned position

Think critically about the ideas in the title of your writing assignment and the ideas of other authors

- when you analyse and brainstorm the title of your essay / research paper
- when you research and read about the topic

However, note it is NOT necessarily the amount of evidence you collect on a topic that determines your position in an argument. Your position will depend on your judgement of the importance of the evidence items that you collect.

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## Writing a thesis statement

**Assignment title:** *Seminars are the most effective way of learning for law students. Discuss*

➤ **Which of the following statements are suitable as a thesis statement for this assignment? What are the problems with the other statements?**

(answers on p4)

- 1 ***Seminars are useful for students.***
- 2 ***Seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods of both learning and teaching as they offer law students the opportunity to interact with a tutor and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas.***
- 3 ***Despite some disadvantages, seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods of both learning and teaching as they offer students the opportunity to interact with a tutor and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas.***
- 4 ***The aim of this essay is to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of seminars for law students.***
- 5 ***In this essay, it is argued that the negative aspects of seminars outweigh the benefits in terms of the limited amount of times and interaction in seminars.***

## A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT:

- **makes a claim**

**Example:**

*Seminars offer students the opportunity to interact with a tutor and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas.*

- **controls the argument and provides a structure**

It indicates the main arguments and support to be presented in the writing. It also indicates that you will discuss the opposing arguments.

## Writing for the Reader

It is important to help the reader to anticipate the main ideas and structure of your writing. Therefore, your thesis (position) statement should be written **in the introduction** of your essay (see Resource tips on writing introductions). The statement may be one sentence or it may need to be more than one sentence, particularly in a longer introduction in a dissertation or research paper.

The reader should be able to find answers in your writing to these questions:

- *Why does the writer claim this?*
  - *What evidence and explanations does the writer use to show that this claim is true?*
  - *Is this a balanced argument with clearly stated arguments for the opposing point of view?*
- Certain expressions can be used to signal a position statement, such as:
    - It is argued that ...*
    - It is suggested that ...*
- ❖ Note: the best way to understand the structure and format of a thesis statement is to practise identifying the writer's position in the introductions of journal articles that you are reading in preparation for an essay or research paper.

**ANSWERS:** identifying a thesis statement

Read and compare your ideas on the following statements.

**1 *Seminars are useful for students.***

X This statement is too general (i.e. seminars are useful for what?). It does not indicate the evidence that you will use to develop your essay.

**2 *Seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods of both learning and teaching as they offer law students the opportunity to interact with a tutor and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas.***

X This statement only partly announces your position. It tells the reader what your main supporting points are but it does not acknowledge opposing arguments.

**3 *Despite some disadvantages, seminars appear to be one of the most effective methods of both learning and teaching as they offer students the opportunity to interact with a tutor and other students while sharing knowledge and ideas.***

✓ This statement announces your position in terms of evidence that you will use. It tells the reader what your main supporting points are. It also states that you will consider an opposing point of view.

**4 *The aim of this essay is to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of seminars for law students.***

X This is a statement of what the writer intends to do in the essay but it does not state the writer's viewpoint on seminars.

**5 *In this essay, it is argued that the negative aspects of seminars outweigh the benefits in terms of the limited amount of time and interaction in seminars***

✓ This statement announces your position in terms of evidence that you will use. It tells the reader what your main supporting points are. It also states that you will consider an opposing point of view.