What is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement consists of one to two sentences that clearly state the main point or purpose of an essay and summarize the specific parts that the essay will discuss.

A thesis statement contains the main point of your essay. This main point is:

- an argument, idea, or opinion that expresses a particular point of view
  - NO: Washington, D.C. is the capital of the United States. – This is a fact that does not express a particular point of view.
  - NO: This essay is about the culture of Washington, D.C. – This announces the topic, but does not express an idea or opinion about the topic.
  - NO: How is Washington, D.C. different from other cities? – This is a question.
  - YES: The culture of Washington, D.C. is different from other cities because it is the capital of the United States. – This is an opinion with a particular point of view.

- one complete thought with a subject, verb, and object
  - NO: Online Monitoring of Employees. – This is a sentence fragment or a title.
  - NO: Monitoring the internet use of employees is valuable to companies, and so are drug tests and background checks. – This is more than one complete thought.
  - YES: Monitoring the internet use of employees is valuable to companies. – This is one complete thought written as a full sentence.

- a narrow and specific subject
  - NO: Television shows criticize the past and the present. – This is a broad subject.
  - YES: While MASH was set in the Korean War, it also criticized the Vietnam War. – This narrows “television shows” to a specific show (MASH) and “the past and the present” to two specific historical events.

A thesis statement contains two or three supporting ideas that directly relate to the main point. The supporting ideas are listed in the order that they will be discussed in the essay.

- NO: Sheep are useful farm animals because they are common animals, they produce wool, and they are cute. – Two of the supporting ideas do not connect with the main point. “Common animals” and “cute” are not reasons sheep are useful.
  - YES: Sheep are useful farm animals because they produce wool, cheese, and meat. – Three supporting ideas (“produce wool, cheese, and meat”) directly relate to the main idea that sheep are useful.

For More Help:
- See the WRL Center handout Developing a Working Thesis.