

The 3-part THESIS Statement & OUTLINE for Essays

Writing a thesis statement is not easy! So I've developed this step-by-step guide to help you think about a) what makes a good thesis statement, b) how to create a thesis statement, and then c) how to outline your essay *from* that thesis statement. The first page tackles the thesis statement itself; the second page illustrates how to outline it. Please read over all of it carefully, and refer back to it often.

THE THREE (3) PARTS OF A THESIS STATEMENT

1. A NARROWLY DEFINED TOPIC

The topic tells your readers what your paper is about. However, you must **narrowly define** your topic or it will be too broad to give more than a superficial overview of your topic. This is where **BRAINSTORMING** comes in!

Here are examples that show you how to narrow down your topic:

- **Too broad:** dessert
- **Better, but still a little too general:** ice cream
- **Narrow:** Chunky Monkey ice cream

2. The CLAIM, which means your ASSERTION/OPINION

Now you need to decide what you want your audience to know about your narrowly defined topic, so you will make a **specific claim**, which is your assertion/opinion about the topic:

- **Too obvious:** Chunky Monkey ice cream is good. ← (duh!) **Opinion, but not debatable.**
- **Still not cutting it:** Chunky Monkey ice cream makes me happy when I'm depressed. ← **Opinion, but not socially relevant - individual.**
- **Better:** Chunky Monkey ice cream supports mental health. ← **My claim - debatable opinion that is socially relevant!**

3. The PLAN, or "The BECAUSE FACTOR"

Now that you have a narrowly defined topic and a specific claim, you need to let the reader know how you plan to support your claim. To do this, ask yourself why you are making that claim. In other words:

"Chunky Monkey ice cream is essential for mental health *because....*" A plan lays out your paper's basic organization with the major points (arguments) you will use to support your assertion:

- **(main point 1) Physical Health:** Ice cream is made up of some of the most important food groups (dairy, nuts, etc) that we're always being reminded to be sure to consume for physical health, which doctors claim leads to mental health.
- **(main point 2) Productivity:** Despite the claims to short-term energy bursts from sugar, this ice cream provides a lot more long-term energy than my non-sugar-induced body has noticed. I can clean the house like nobody's business after a pint of this stuff! And we all know that a mentally healthy individual is a productive individual.
- **(main point 3) Positive Relationships:** see, if I am eating Chunky Monkey ice cream, it's likely that either my partner or children have brought it to me as a token of truce, or because they've noticed that I'm depressed. Either way, I like them a lot better post-ice cream than pre-ice cream.

NOTE: For each main point here, I will develop a **TOPIC SENTENCE** that will start each body paragraph in my outline, and underneath that topic sentence I will provide **SUPPORTING DETAILS** that support *only* that one main point.

THE THESIS STATEMENT: And now we put it all together....

Thesis Statement: Chunky Monkey ice cream is essential for mental health because of its benefits to one's physical health, daily productivity, and familial relationships.

Notice that I:

- Did not write **"I think"** or **"I believe."** Since I'm writing the essay, that's already a given. Besides, it would sound like I didn't truly believe my statement, and I assure you that I'm dead serious about my Chunky Monkey ice cream.
- Did not follow the overly **obvious path** that ice cream is bad for one's health. It's boring. Would you read an essay about something you've heard already 40,000 times? Remember, *a writer requires an audience.*
- Was **specific** about my topic and main points, but that in my thesis I did not provide details that will be in the body of my essay.

NOW LET'S OUTLINE OUR IDEAS



OUR ROADMAP.....

For some reason many of us don't care for outlines, but I assure you that if you carefully and thoughtfully outline your essay, you will thank yourself at the next stage when you begin to WRITE it out!

The following are elements of an essay that you must include in your outline:

Thesis Statement: You've already done the work for the thesis statement, so be sure to include it at the very beginning so that both you and I have a point to refer back to!

Topic Sentences: For each paragraph, begin with a sentence, which includes **ONE MAIN POINT** and a **CLAIM**, that supports the thesis statement. **This is a complete sentence.** In the outline, the topic sentences are the Roman Numerals (I, II, III, etc.).

Supporting Details: Provide details that **support** your **topic sentence**, such as explanation, examples (personal or researched), illustrations (analogy, etc.), and research (statistics, quote, etc.). The details do not have to be given in complete sentences, but must clearly show how they support the topic sentence. In the outline, the **supporting details** are the capital letters (A, B, C, etc.) and the **sub-supporting details** are the lowercase Roman Numerals (i, ii, iii, iv, etc.). You can include as many supporting and sub-supporting details as you need to fully develop the topic sentence (i.e. sometimes you may not have any sub-supporting details in a given area).

TWO IMPORTANT RULES: (a) if a detail does not support the main point and claim of the topic sentence, *it does not belong there*; (b) if you use any research, *you must provide a citation* (give the author credit!).

THE OUTLINE

Thesis Statement: Chunky Monkey ice cream should be marketed as a mental health cure because of its benefits to one's physical health, daily productivity, and familial relationships, all vital elements to one's sanity.

I. Chunky Monkey ice cream contributes to a physically healthy lifestyle, which leads to a mentally healthy lifestyle. ← **This is the topic sentence for main point 1: (physical health)...** notice that it is a complete sentence!

A. Ingredients from many good food groups ← **supporting detail**

i. Dairy ← **sub-supporting details further support the supporting detail**

ii. Nuts/Bran/Wheat

iii. Fruits

B. The sugar provides energy to exercise ← **supporting detail**

i. Exercise - even if one "comes down" after a sugar high, during the sugar high s/he is using more energy than when depressed and sleeping

ii. Doctors claim physical health leads to mental health (include a research source citation that supports claim) ← **sub-supporting detail with research - use correct in-text citation**

II. A physically healthy person is much more productive, and productivity leads to a more stable sense of self personally and professionally. ← **topic sentence for main pt 2 (productivity)...**note that the topic sentence supports the thesis statement

A. Energy: not only exercise, but work too. ← **each supporting detail in this section supports topic sentence II**

i. At home and job ← **each sub-supporting detail supports the supporting detail immediately above it**

B. Feeling of accomplishment/worthiness = improved mental health.

i. Here I might find statistics from a psychology study to prove my point, so I would include my researched source citation.

ii. Praise: when one does well, the feedback from others enhances his/her own mental health

Continue with your outline, covering as many MAIN POINTS as you need for a solid, well-developed essay. If I were to finish this outline, I would still have *at least* one more Roman Numeral to go (III), which would be my third main point.

If you spend the time to do this outline thoroughly, you will be able to dive right into the essay writing because you will have developed your **ROADMAP....**

And for your convenience, I've created a template for your outline and Works Cited page. (See how I look out for you!)