What is a thesis statement?
A thesis statement is a statement which presents the position you will argue for in your essay.

It is a key element of a well-argued academic essay and the first major signpost in your essay.

A thesis statement is about taking a position. It means you cannot sit on the fence.

“In Australia, everyone who finishes year 12 should go to university” is a position.

“There are advantages and disadvantages to going to university” is sitting on the fence.

A good thesis statement
• is debatable, that is, it must be possible to present a case for and against the statement (but you argue for one side)
• limits the scope of your essay
• can be supported by the academic literature.

Good thesis statements are usually one sentence long.

In your essay, you will be expected to argue for one position. However, it’s a good idea to show that you are aware of any main counter positions.

Where is the thesis statement placed?
The thesis statement is usually placed towards the end of your Introduction (see EA 1.3)

Tip
Don’t confuse your thesis statement with statements about the scope of your essay.

Example—thesis statement
A thesis statement clearly states your position e.g. Face-to-face lectures will be non existent in Australian universities by 2020.

Example—scope
The scope describes what issues/topics you will cover and/or what reasons you will give in the Body of your essay to convince the reader of your position e.g. Increasingly lecturers are putting their lectures on Lectopia, fewer and fewer students are attending face-to-face lectures each year, increasing numbers of students are enrolling in online university courses.

Note
Not all academic essays will be argumentative essays. Some essays may require you to describe something. In descriptive essays you may not be required to state your position.
Tips
Developing a thesis statement takes time so it’s useful to start with a working or provisional thesis statement. Having a working thesis statement means you can be more focussed in your research.

Remember
In the early stages of the essay writing process, you will probably want to play around with the wording and maybe even the emphasis of your thesis statement. Expect it to evolve as you gain new insights, find more pertinent evidence and develop your understanding of the topic.

Keep your eye on the ball
Keep checking that your thesis statement corresponds with the question you are meant to be answering. If you don’t, you may find that you have a great thesis statement but its focus has moved beyond the essay question.

One way to keep checking is to ask yourself questions such as, “What is the main point I want to convince my reader of?” “Are the reasons I’ve taken note of strong enough to convince the reader of my point?”

Thesis statement or not?
Wearing sunscreen is more harmful to human skin than getting sunburnt.

The chemicals in sunscreen damage the human skin and so does getting sunburnt.

Explanation: The above statement does not present a position, it is a “sitting on the fence” statement.