



Writing Thesis Statements

What is a thesis?

A strong thesis statement is the foundation of any paper, and it should be the driving argument, idea, or expression you attempt to prove. A thesis:

- Tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.
- Is a road map for the paper and tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper.
- Directly answers the question asked. A thesis is an interpretation of a question or subject, not the subject itself.
- Makes a claim that others might dispute.
- Is usually a single sentence near the beginning of your paper (most often, at the end of the first paragraph) that presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper, the body of the essay, gathers and organizes evidence that will persuade the reader of the logic of your interpretation.

How do I formulate a thesis statement?

To begin writing a thesis you should:

- Establish a clear topic
- Make a claim or state an idea about that topic
- Find reasons or examples to support your claim
- Be specific and concise

Choose a topic you are interested in or feel passionate about. It is also helpful to ask yourself questions about your proposed topics and attempt to answer them.

What support can you find for your answers?

Browse your textbooks or articles on scholarly databases to see what has already been written on this topic. Which points do you agree or disagree with? Why?

Is my thesis strong enough to support my paper?

Once you have drafted a thesis statement or brainstormed some ideas, it is best to get advice from classmates, professors, or instructors for additional feedback. You can also ask yourself the following questions:

- **Do I answer the question?** Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.

- **Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?** If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
- **Is my thesis statement specific enough?** Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like "good" or "successful," see if you could be more specific: why is something "good"; what specifically makes something "successful"?
- **Does my thesis pass the "So what?" test?** If a reader's first response is likely to be "So what?" then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- **Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?** If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It's okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
- **Does my thesis pass the "how and why?" test?** If a reader's first response is "how?" or "why?" your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

Find additional information in the sources used to create this guide by clicking on these links: [University of North Carolina](#) and [Indiana University](#).

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