



Thesis Statements

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement:

- is usually a single sentence or two near the beginning of your paper (frequently at the end of the first paragraph) which presents your argument to the reader. The rest of the paper will provide evidence which supports this thesis statement, or argument.
- summarizes the main point, main idea, or central message of the paper.
- makes a claim that others might dispute.
- tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the paper, and/or how you will interpret, or make sense of, the significance of the topic you are discussing.

How do I create a thesis statement?

- Collect and organize data/information.
- Interpret the gathered information.
 - How you will interpret, or make sense of, the information you collect is determined by the discipline you are in.
 - E.g. for an english literature paper you might collect quotes or passages, and consider what the evidence suggests about an overarching idea or theme.
- Form an opinion on the collected evidence, this will function as your “working thesis.” It’s ok to come back and change your thesis as your paper develops, or even after you are finished writing!

Check Your Thesis

- After you have revised and refined your “working thesis,” and have a version of it that is closer to what will be your final thesis, ask yourself these questions to determine if you have a strong thesis:

Is it specific?

- The scope of your thesis should be narrow enough that you will be able to support it sufficiently within the length of your paper. For example:
 - Too broad: Throughout history, there has been much debate over what role women should or should not play within society.
 - Sufficiently narrow: Contrary to popular belief, women in late 18th century England were not just peripheral participants in the Enlightenment, but active agents who helped shaped the historical course of the movement.

Is it brief and to the point?

- Don't worry about saying every single thing in your thesis, the thesis should address the main point of the paper without giving too much detail.
 - Not brief and to the point: Robert Orsi's book *The Madonna of 115th Street* is a unique historical book because he chooses to examine the Italian-American immigrants from their own perspectives, and by doing so he reveals to the reader that although the lives of women were deeply characterized by the patriarchal structure of their community which often confined them to the home where they watched after the children and contributed to housework, we can also see how the women's position as lower-class workers in late nineteenth century capitalist America had a profound effect on the way that they perceived their own lives and in how they identified with the Madonna as someone who resembled their own positions.
 - Brief and to the point: The Italian-American women of Robert Orsi's book, *The Madonna of 115th Street*, inhabited a place of tension as both immigrants and women; their affinity to the Madonna was not only because she was a woman, but because she was also an immigrant.

Is it arguable?

- Can you think of a counter-argument, or is there another “side” to your thesis? Can it be supported with evidence?
 - Not arguable: On July 4, 1776, the independence of the United States was declared.
 - Arguable: By failing to include universal equality in the Declaration of Independence, the colonists effectively demonstrated that their desire for independence from the mother country was motivated by economics, rather than a profound commitment to civil liberties.

Does it have a “so what?”

- Should we care about your argument? Why? Answer this question in your thesis, throughout your paper, and in the conclusion.
 - Lacking a “so what”: Education should be free.
 - With a “so what”: Making education free in the United States would not only eliminate historical class and racial divides, but would effectively raise the standard of living for our population.
- Would someone want to read your paper based on the topic? Pick something you are passionate about and on which you have a strong opinion.
 - Not so interesting: Violets are the favorite flower of many, suggesting that the color purple has a certain value to it.
 - More interesting: In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald frequently uses the metaphors and analogies of different types of flower to enhance his female characterizations, suggesting a certain perceived delicacy of femininity within the novel.

Types of Thesis: Examples

- **Argumentative:**
 - Although women entered the workforce in the Soviet Union-- and were theoretically supposed to share equal roles with men-- most women continued to do most of the domestic duties within the household. The economic reductionist view of many of the Soviet leaders failed to address the nuances of cultural values and expectations, so that sexism was changed, but not eradicated as they had hoped.
- **Compare/Contrast:**
 - While Judaism and Christianity have similar historical origins and theological beliefs, Christianity's belief in Jesus as the incarnation creates many key differences between the two faiths.
- **Narrative:**
 - The moment that defined the rest of my adolescence was when I discovered my mother had been reading my journals.
- **Analytical:**
 - Instead of meaningfully objecting to the traditional depiction of heterosexual romance in Hollywood, *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* ends up reinforcing other deeply-rooted and harmful stereotypes about gender, while drawing attention to an unfortunate class character in common representations of female sexual liberation.
- **Persuasive:**
 - Though many within the politically right faction believe that global warming does not exist, scientific data collected over decades reveals the overwhelming need, not only to take global warming seriously, but to act immediately to reverse the process.