



Why are you Writing?

Advice for writing a thesis

Prepared by the American University
Writing Center

What is a Thesis?

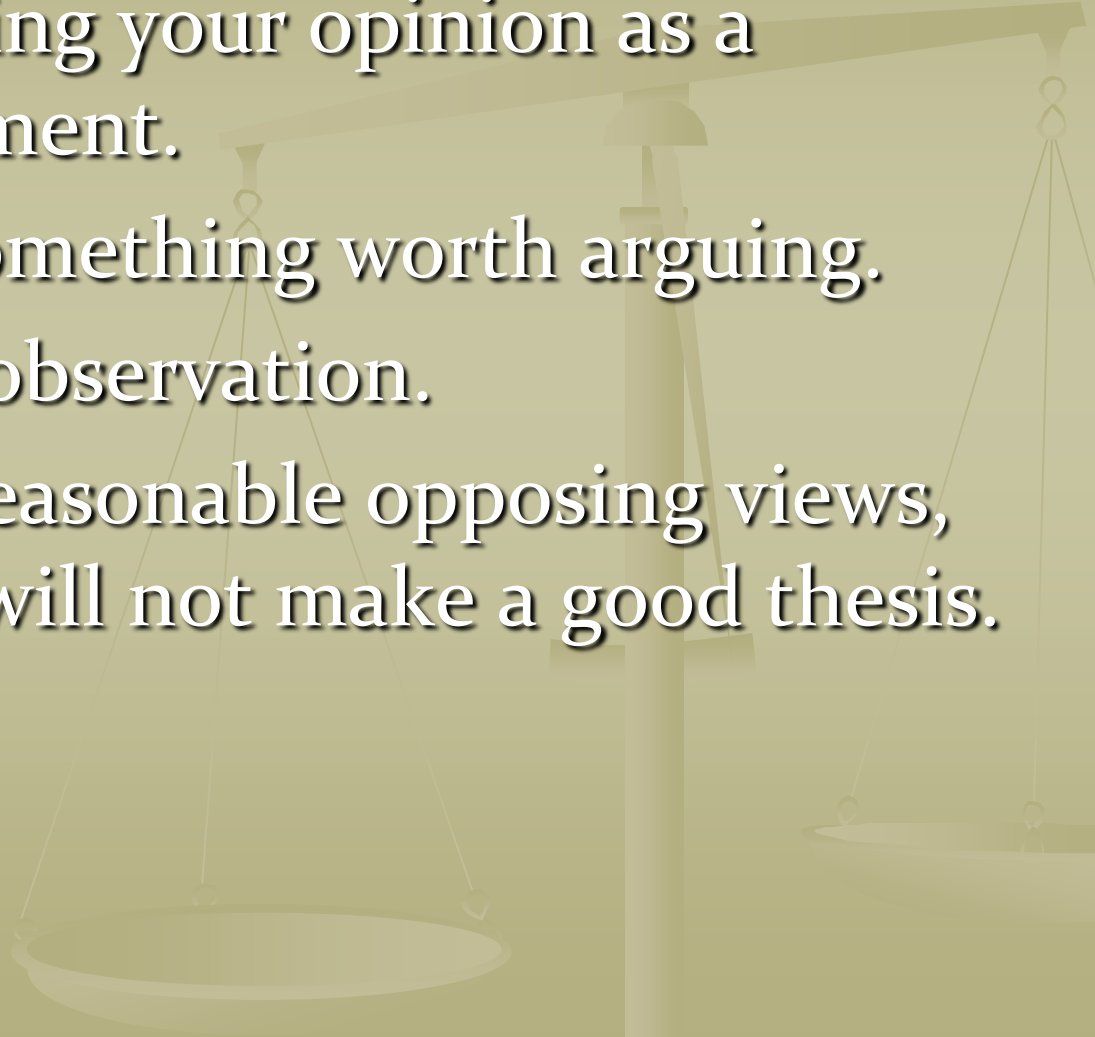


- Your Thesis is the mission statement of your paper.
 - What are you trying to prove or show with your paper?
 - Why is your paper important?
- Your Thesis is the main point of your paper.
 - What do you want to say/explain/explore in your paper?

Essay Topic

- Your college writing professor assigns a short research essay on a neighborhood in Washington DC.
- You decide you want to write about Columbia Heights.
 - This topic is a good starting point, but you need to focus more.
 - You need to find an arguable thesis that is not too narrow, too broad or too obvious.

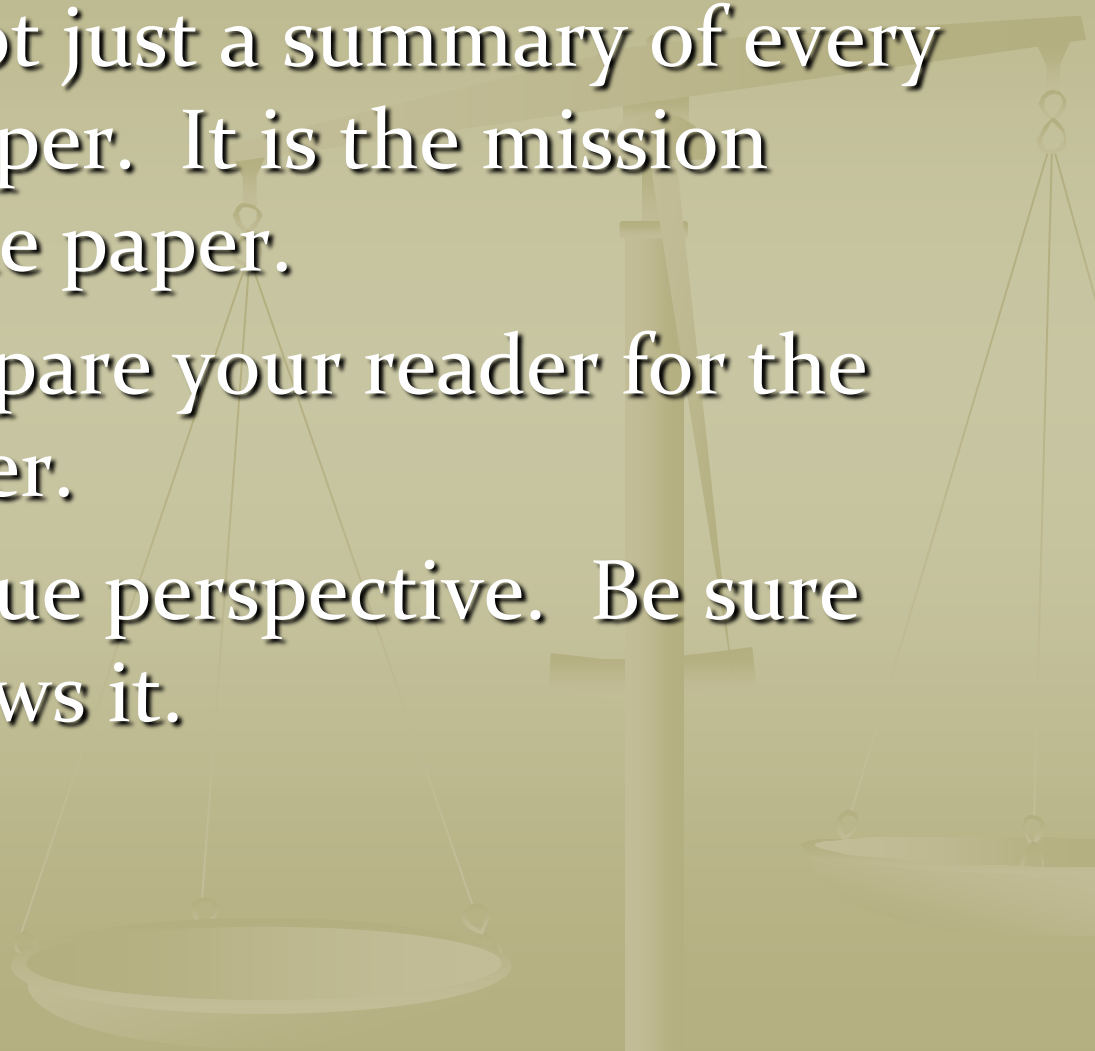
Your Thesis is a Position

- You are presenting your opinion as a defensible argument.
 - It needs to be something worth arguing.
 - It is not just an observation.
 - If there are no reasonable opposing views, your argument will not make a good thesis.
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The Academic Context

- Your thesis does not exist in a vacuum. Other writers have most likely written about your topic, and you need to find the place for your argument in the framework and/or adds to the conversation.
- So you need to research and develop your position.
- Be aware of your audience: what do they already know and believe about the topic?

As you Draft your Thesis Remember...

- Your thesis is not just a summary of every point in your paper. It is the mission statement for the paper.
 - You want to prepare your reader for the rest of your paper.
 - You have a unique perspective. Be sure your reader knows it.
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Also Remember...

- You make a promise to your reader with your thesis.
- Your thesis explains your aim for your paper and tells your reader what to expect.



Narrow your Thesis



- You decide that the point of your paper is to examine how the history of Columbia Heights shows the American Dream.
- This is the thesis in the example essay:
 - **Columbia Heights shows the American Dream through its history.**

Unpack your Thesis

- Examine your thesis as you write your paper:
 - **Columbia Heights shows the American Dream through its history.**
- **Ask Questions of your thesis:**
 - How does a neighborhood, particularly Columbia Heights, show the American Dream?
 - Is it particular moments in its history that show the American Dream or its entire history? How does that work?
 - How is this neighborhood significant today?
 - Does this thesis accurately reflect the content of the paper?

Good and Bad in your Thesis

Columbia Heights shows the American Dream through its history.

Good Things

- Contains an idea
 - Looking at the history of a neighborhood is interesting.
- Leads to research about Columbia Heights

Bad Things

- Does not reflect what is in the paper
 - The paper discusses location and never discusses historical events.
- Is not clear
 - How does a neighborhood show the American Dream?
- Does not make a specific argument

Improve your Thesis

- Columbia Heights shows the American Dream through its history.
- Consider a sentence like: **The history of Columbia Heights illustrates the American Dream because of the way citizens of the neighborhood improved with their own innovation and ingenuity.**
- This is more arguable because you could point to particular actions citizens improved the neighborhood and connect it to the American Dream.

Tips to Remember



- You are not carving your paper into marble; it can be rewritten. Experiment. Your thesis may change during the writing process.
- Your job is to find the best way to have your paper fit your thesis.
- Your essay will be easier to write with a one-sentence thesis at the beginning, although that is not an unbreakable rule.

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