



strong thesis statements

Most academic writing is argumentative. The thesis statement expresses the **central argument** or **assertion** that the rest of the paper will support. A good thesis statement is specific, demonstrable, and still debatable. Someone could disagree with you, but they'd have to poke holes in your reasoning or evidence.

A NOTE FOR THESIS ANXIETY

If contributing to the scholarly conversation sounds daunting, take heart, because it is, for everyone! Also, you're a student. No one is expecting you to be perfect at it. And adding something new to the conversation does not require you to produce a single earth-shattering idea that no one has ever thought of before.

Depending on the assignment, chances are that you are going to take a side in a debate that many people have taken before. Your interpretation of evidence may well be the part of your argument that is original and new. Even if your claim isn't completely new, the way you demonstrate it can be!

DEFINITION OF A THESIS BASED ON SUBJECT

English: "A thesis is an interpretive argument about a text or an aspect of a text. An interpretive argument is defined as one that makes a reasonable but contestable claim about a text; in other words, it is an opinion about a text that can be supported with textual evidence."

Sciences (Biology): "A well-written scientific paper explains the scientist's motivation for doing an experiment, the experimental design and execution, and the meaning of the results... The last sentences of the introduction should be a statement of objectives and a statement of hypotheses."

Business: "When you write in business courses, you will usually write for a specific audience. Your goal will be to communicate in a straight-forward manner and with a clear purpose."

History: "In historical writing, a thesis explains the words or deeds of people in the past. It shows cause and effect; it answers the question why?... A thesis must change a

reader's mind to be of value. If it presents only facts or an obvious finding, it will merely confirm what the reader already believes."

WHAT IT SHOULD LOOK LIKE

A claim + brief summary of evidence + explanation of why the argument is important

Example: School uniforms should be implemented in all public schools because they are shown to increase grades and attendance, reduce bullying and violence, and improve school spirit, resulting in a better educational environment for all students.

- So, what's my claim? School uniforms should be implemented in all public schools
- What's my reasoning? They are shown to increase grades and attendance, reduce bullying and violence, and improve school spirit
- Why is it important? Requiring school uniforms results in a better educational environment for all students

WHAT IT SHOULD NOT LOOK LIKE

- An opinion based on taste/preference (example: grape jelly is the best, because...)
- An inarguable fact (example: strawberry- and grape-flavored fruit spreads are popular in the United States)
- A broad, unoriginal statement (example: this paper will discuss many different types of jams and jellies that contribute to American food culture)

HOW TO START WRITING YOUR ARGUMENT → ARRIVE AT A THESIS

Step 1: Make sure you understand the assignment.

If it's unclear, ask your instructor if the assignment requires a thesis statement. If your prompt asks you analyze, interpret, compare and contrast, demonstrate cause and effect, or to take a stand on an issue, it is likely that you are being asked to develop a thesis and to support it persuasively.

Step 2: Collect and organize evidence.

Look for possible relationships and patterns. When reading, take notes of the main ideas that stand out to you in your sources. What information/opinions repeat? What perspectives are under/overrepresented in your sources? What information is confusing, contradictory, or underexplained? What sources seem especially interesting or original? Which sources do you like reading and which do you dislike? Why?

Step 3: Freewrite!

- Set a timer for 15 minutes and write as quickly as you can about what you think of your topic and what you have read. What gut instincts/opinions have you felt about the topic? What prior opinions did you have going in, and have they changed, or remained the same? Why is this topic important?
- Once the timer is up, step away from your writing for at least 15 minutes.
- When you come back, read back over your freewrite and highlight the ideas that are most interesting to you. Is there a main idea among these ideas? How can you support it?

You can repeat this process (taking frequent breaks!) a few times until you have put together a working thesis. It doesn't have to be perfect.

Step 4

Use your working thesis to start your draft. Try outlining your paper with your thesis and supporting ideas in a logical order. Fill out the easiest supporting paragraphs first. Remember: most theses change once a writer gets going on his/her ideas! Expect that this will happen to your thesis, too. Don't panic when it does!

OTHER WAYS GET JUICES FLOWING

List Ideas

Make a list of the ideas that you want to include; consider the ideas and try to group them. For example, if I were writing a paper on the themes expressed in *Wuthering Heights*, I might jot down these ideas:

- Nature = opposite of civil society
- Catherine and Heathcliff = nature, Edward and Isabella = civil society
- Nature = suspicious, evil, tempestuous, dangerous (does that conflict with 1?)
- People are rigid and their health/wellness respond to their environments (not flexible or surprising) -> going against someone's nature causes damage

Formula

Use a formula to arrive at a working thesis statement (you will revise this later).

1. Although most readers of _____ have argued that _____, closer examination shows that _____.
2. _____ uses _____ and _____ to prove that _____.

3. The phenomenon of _____ is a result of the combination of _____, _____, and _____.

Category of Claim

Consider the following when discovering a debatable but demonstrable claim for your assignment.

Claims of fact or definition: These claims argue about what the definition of something is or whether something is a settled fact. Example:

While some pundits have framed a four-year college education as something necessary for adult success, this notion should not be treated as a given.

Claims of cause and effect: These claims argue that one person, thing, or event caused another thing or event to occur. Example:

Federal student loan policies have contributed to widespread growth in college tuition.

Claims about value: These are claims made of what something is worth, whether we value it or not, how we would rate or categorize something. Example:

The student debt crisis is a major crisis today and will have devastating effects on job security and economic stability in years to come.

Claims about solutions or policies: These are claims that argue for or against a certain solution or policy approach to a problem. Example:

Rather than encouraging all students to attend four-year colleges, we should instead emphasize the benefits and opportunities provided by two-year colleges, technical schools, and trade schools.

Which type of claim is right for your argument? Which type of thesis or claim you use for your argument will depend on your position and knowledge of the topic, your audience, and the context of your paper. You might want to think about where you imagine your audience to be on this topic and pinpoint where you think the biggest difference in viewpoints might be. Even if you start with one type of claim you probably will be using several within the paper. Regardless of the type of claim you choose to utilize it is key to identify the controversy or debate you are addressing and to define your position early on in the paper.

