

FINDING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

At some point you need to focus in, in order to find a thesis for your research paper. When to focus in depends on you, your topic and your purpose, so it could happen at any stage as you develop your paper. As you explore the ideas related to the topic, you will edge towards a thesis, but this process may take time.

The thesis is your **point of view**--the main point you want to make. It changes the paper from being a piece of writing generally "about" a topic and makes it into a paper which actually gives the reader something--a statement you will prove, a challenge to a common idea, an answer to a question. The thesis tells the reader what insight or knowledge he or she will gain through reading the paper.

HOW TO DECIDE ON A THESIS FOR YOUR PAPER:

1. **Select** key (i.e. important) ideas from your pool of ideas about the topic
2. Choose the one you consider most interesting and important, based on the research you have read up to this point
3. **Consider** your own point of view about this idea: come up with a claim or an assertion you could argue for, concerning this idea
4. **Write** your point of view in a rough (tentative) statement to use as a guide as you write your first draft. This statement will define your point of view and your purpose in writing the paper:

i.e. "In this paper I want to show/ argue that X is the case" or "A is caused by X, Y and Z"

Keep in mind that you may re-work the thesis statement as you continue to develop the paper: the more you work with your topic, the more familiar you will become with the major issues involved in the subject. Through this process, you will refine your own point of view on the topic.

As you develop your ideas further you might find that you actually want to argue in a different direction! This is fine—writing a paper is a creative process and not one that always proceeds in a predictable way.

The important thing is to be aware of how your thinking on your topic progresses as you develop your paper. For this reason, keep your thesis statement in sight as you work on the paper so that you always remind yourself in what direction you are heading. As you work, think about how the ideas confirm and support the statement; if they don't, you will most likely want to rework it.

A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT:

- takes a stand, expressing your point of view
- is a statement, not a question
- needs to be narrow enough to lead to a well-focused paper
- tells the reader something about the topic, something with which some people could disagree
- is expressed in one or two sentences--your reader must be able to find it easily and understand it fully

How you choose and phrase your thesis statement depends on the way you see your topic and the direction you want to take to explore it further.

EXAMPLES OF THESIS STATEMENTS

Weak—too obvious

“Hockey is very popular in Quebec”

This is weak because it is difficult to argue with—who would disagree?

Slightly better

“The Montreal Canadiens are a better hockey team than the Toronto Maple Leafs” would be slightly better—it is an assertion, a point of view that can be challenged. To make it strong you would need to define the criteria you are using to make this assertion.

Strong

The Montreal Canadiens are a better team than the Toronto Maple Leafs because of their history of Stanley cup wins and their stronger performance statistics.

Another example:

Too broad

Chronic illnesses cause anxiety

More focused

Living with chronic illness increases ones likelihood of experiencing anxiety

Stronger

The experience of living with a chronic illness contributes to the development of anxiety disorders.

HOW TO EVALUATE YOUR THESIS STATEMENT:

- Is it a complete sentence (and not a question)?
- Does it have an opposing argument?
- Is every word clear and unambiguous in meaning?
- Does the statement make too large a claim to prove in an assignment of this length?
- Does the thesis statement reveal how you are going to develop your argument?
- What evidence will your reader need from you to agree that the thesis is true?