

THE THESIS OF AN ESSAY

Your guide to writing an effective thesis statement

WHY DO YOU NEED A THESIS STATEMENT?

- A **thesis** is the main idea which forms the basis of any academic essay.
- The thesis provides the main **supporting points** that will be developed in the essay's body.
 - The supporting points are later presented in the **topic sentences** of the body paragraphs. When these sentences clearly connect to and reinforce the thesis, the essay has **unity**.
 - The thesis and topic sentences can be read as a summary of the entire essay.

WHAT KIND OF ESSAY DO YOU HAVE TO WRITE?

- Read your **instructions** carefully. Is the essay expository, descriptive, narrative, persuasive, argumentative, critical, comparative, reflective, analytical, or literary? Is it a research paper?
- Look at the **key verbs** in the instructions, and you will have a better understanding of the point of your paper and how to word your thesis.

FORMULATING A THESIS STATEMENT:

Make it Clear and Concise:

- Express your thesis in **one** sentence.
- Choose **precise** words. Have you chosen the best word(s) to express your idea(s)?
- **Just say** your argument. Avoid preview phrases (unless one is required):
 - ~~This essay will prove that~~ Climate change is responsible for global food shortages.
 - ~~In this paper I will prove~~ Cigarette advertising is a threat to children's health.
- First, express the **main idea**; then find a number of **supporting points** for your thesis. Each of these points will later be developed into a body paragraph.
- The **supporting points** may be incorporated into your thesis sentence or may be listed separately in your introduction. Read your teacher's instructions.
- ✓ • Cigarette advertising is a threat to children's health **because** it influences them to smoke, influences adults to smoke around them, **and** glamorizes addiction in general.

Make it Arguable and Specific:

- A good, arguable thesis usually answers the questions **why** or **how**.
- Your thesis should be phrased as an **objective** argument that you can build a case for with the support of evidence or persuasion.
 - ~~I think~~ Platonic friendship is stronger than romantic love.
- To make your thesis more **specific**, imagine an objection to it and reply.
 - **Thesis:** Platonic friendship is stronger than romantic love.
 - **Objection:** Yeah, but couldn't romantic love be stronger?
 - **Reply (new thesis):** Actually, Platonic friendship is more stable than romantic love.
- **Limit your topic** by asking **who, what, where, and when**.
 - X • Too broad: Women are increasingly unemployed. (What women? Since when?)
 - ✓ • Specific: Since 2015, Canadian single mothers have faced rising unemployment.



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Still Not Sure If Your Thesis is Strong Enough?

- Re-read your **instructions**. Contact the teacher if you need help understanding the assignment.
- Have you tried phrasing the thesis with **key words** from your **essay question**?
- Should you **brainstorm** the topic (again)?
- Should you **read** through the assigned text again? Should you **research** your topic more?
- Did you take **thoughtful notes** on your readings? Should you **review** your class notes?
 - Can you form new **connections** between ideas in your notes? Ask:
 - What does X have to do with Y?
 - How does A relate to B?
 - How are C and Z similar/different?
- Could you **start writing** a body paragraph? Start with one point that you could use.
- Show the teacher a **draft of your thesis** to check if you are on the right track.

ADAPTING YOUR THESIS:

You can update your thesis at any point. You can **narrow**, **broaden**, **refocus**, or **rephrase** it.

- Is there a sentence in your **conclusion** that could be a better thesis? If so, use it as your new thesis.
- Has your **understanding** of the subject changed since you started your essay?
- Did you form new, unexpected **connections** between ideas?
- Have you thought of a more precise way to address the **essay question**?
- If you have an **unexpected idea** that you wrote in a body paragraph, should you adjust your thesis to include it? Or should you revise your paragraph instead?

EXAMPLES OF THESIS STATEMENTS:

Argumentative / Persuasive Essay: Boxing **should** be outlawed **because** it is an inherently violent blood sport.

Comparative Essay: **Whereas** the practice of rewarding children with unhealthy sweets for good marks is common in **Canada**, the culture around sweets in **China** is very different.

Analytical/Critical Essay: The author's argument is unconvincing **because** he fails to consider how the criminalization of marijuana contributes to negative social effects.

Literary Essay

- **Focus on literary techniques / form:** In "The Raven," Edgar Allan Poe **uses** the devices of meter, assonance, and repetition **to produce** feelings of dread and obsession.

- **Focus on theme / ideas:** The author **shows how** blind greed can drive away family by depicting the protagonist's growing obsession with money.

Aravind Adiga's **depiction of** the gap between rich and poor in *White Tiger* **demonstrates** the detrimental effects of globalization.

Research Paper (historical):

The main causes of the Haitian Revolution were deep social divides within Haitian society, the example of the French Revolution, **and** the crisis caused by the war between England and Spain, which resulted in the abolition of slavery.

For more information, Contact the Academic Skills Centre.