

## Thesis Development and Design

### About the Thesis

The thesis is the central assertion of the essay. It must be narrow, purposeful, specific, and may suggest an organization. Depending on the type of paper, it should also be arguable or debatable.

#### Narrow -- Unified

- Poor: The university must fix its parking problem and dining hall food.
- Better: A wider selection of meal options would enhance the dining experience at this university.

#### Narrow -- Precise

- Poor: The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is cool.
- Better: Revolving exhibits make the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame an excellent place to visit again and again.

#### Purposeful – Complete Idea

- Poor: The story of my auto accident.
- Better: Drivers should learn defensive driving skills to reduce the likelihood of auto accidents.

#### Purposeful – Assertive

- Poor: Lincoln and Kennedy were great presidents.
- Better: Lincoln was a greater president than Kennedy.

#### Specific

- Poor: There were many great generals in WWII.
- Better: Eisenhower's D-Day leadership makes him the greatest Allied general of WWII.

Remember, thesis statements avoid figures of speech and clichés as well.

- Poor: The Warren Report stinks like yesterday's garbage.
- Better: New photography technologies help refute Warren Report findings.

The thesis must have a point...

1. that readers care about
2. that is debatable/that has diverse opinions
3. that can be supported with details
4. that is a complete sentence (or two!) which makes an assertion

The thesis reflects your purpose. It may be...

1. expressive – relate personal experience
2. exploratory – examine an issue
3. explanatory – discuss a concept
4. persuasive – argue a point

### What strategies can I use to organize my thesis?

Think about your topic and purpose in light of the patterns of organization/modes of thinking:

- Cause & Effect
- Comparison & Contrast
- Problem & Solution
- Classification & Division
- Illustration
- Description
- Narration
- Process
- Definition

Look back at the earlier examples on this sheet. Which patterns are used in each example?

### Where can I find my thesis?

The thesis is usually found...

1. in the first paragraph, often as the last sentence of the opening paragraph.
2. at the end of the introduction, if the introduction has multiple paragraphs.
3. at the start of the conclusion, if the topic of the paper is volatile or if a narrative organization is applied to the whole document.

The thesis may be implied in some more advanced narratives.

### What if I can't find my thesis?

1. Write your first draft – go until you feel that you absolutely have nothing else to say about the subject.
2. Look at your conclusion – the last thing you wrote. Your thesis is likely to be either the first sentence or the last sentence of the conclusion.

Why does this work? It works because we use narrative as our first way of organizing our thoughts, and our point in a narrative naturally and usually comes at the end.

### Will my thesis change as I write?

Yes. This is because writing is a way of learning, and as you write, think, research, and explore, your beliefs and ideas may change. When this happens, it's okay to change your thesis to suit your new ideas and beliefs.

### References

Aaron, J. E. (2004). *The Little, Brown compact handbook* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Pearson Longman.

Ruskiewicz, J., Hairston, M. & Seward, D. E. (2002). *SF writer* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Longman.