

Thesis Statements

What are they and what makes a good one?

What is a thesis?

- A statement that expresses the **claim** or **point** you will make about your subject
- Answers the question: What is the main idea I'm trying to present to the reader?
- Not the same as a topic

What a thesis is NOT

1. An announcement of the topic: “In this paper, I will discuss Governor McMaster’s new economic policies.”
2. A statement of fact: “The Republican Party has nominated Donald Trump as their presidential candidate.”
3. A summary of plot: “In Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, a young soldier witnesses violence and horror in Vietnam.”
4. A value judgment that can’t be substantiated with evidence: “I liked *Wonder Woman* very much because it was an entertaining movie.”

When do I come up with a thesis?

Three questions to answer first:

- Why am I writing this paper? (purpose)
 - For whom am I writing? (audience)
 - What is my subject? (topic)
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- Draft a **working thesis** before writing
 - This thesis will work like a hypothesis—test it against evidence as you carry out the writing process; change it if necessary
 - Having a working thesis will do at least 3 things:
 - Help you see where you're going and why(it will control the direction of your entire paper)
 - Help give you a single focus as you develop your ideas
 - Help you select the material you will use in the paper, the evidence, you will include

Where does a thesis go?

- Generally, readers expect to see your thesis near the end of your introductory paragraph
- Don't worry about “giving everything away”—you're writing an academic essay, NOT a detective novel!

Guidelines for Writing a Good Thesis

- A good thesis is SPECIFIC. More than anything, a vague thesis reflects a lack of clarity in the writer's mind and usually leads to an essay that talks around the subject but never makes a coherent point.

Poor: Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election because she made too many mistakes.

Better: Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election because of low voter turn-out among African Americans.

Better: Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 presidential election because of a last-minute FBI announcement about a new investigation into possible e-mail irregularities.

Guidelines for Writing a Good Thesis

- A good thesis asserts ONE MAIN IDEA. Your thesis should present one major idea and the body of your assignment should support that main idea. Your thesis should also be limited to fit the assignment. Don't allow your thesis to promise more of a discussion than you can deliver in a short essay.

Poor: Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried* is a book that shows the immorality of war, that questions what true courage consists of, and that also focuses on storytelling itself.

Better: In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien relies on a recurring image of ghosts to depict how American soldiers fighting in Vietnam continue to be haunted by their war experiences.

Guidelines for Writing a Good Thesis

- A good thesis is ARGUMENTATIVE. Your thesis should make a point that you can imagine someone disagreeing with. It will be much more interesting if you can push beyond the obvious—if you can say something surprising about your topic.

Poor: Socrates and Thoreau are both thinkers concerned about the relationship between the individual and the state.

Better: While Socrates sees the state as a parental figure that should be respected and Thoreau sees the state as a hindrance to morality at best, the two thinkers actually share much in common. Despite their differences, both men argue that individuals must ultimately follow the authority of their own consciences.

Guidelines for Writing a Good Thesis

- A good thesis helps **OUTLINE** your paper for you. It sets up what you will have to prove in the body of your paper.

Poor: The boy in James Joyce's story "Araby" is self-deluded.

Better: The boy in James Joyce's story "Araby" deludes himself about his relationship with Mangan's sister from the beginning of the story. Through this self-delusion, he increasingly resembles the adult characters, and later, at Araby, he realizes the parallel between his own self-delusion and the hypocrisy and vanity of the adult world.