

## CREATING A THESIS STATEMENT

The **thesis statement** is your argument, your point, your claim, or your opinion ABOUT your topic.

**Working thesis**: this is a tentative statement about your topic that is likely to change as you conduct your research. It helps you to focus your research by narrowing your topic. This is generally something that can be argued.

### *How to narrow down your topic:*

Brainstorm and research questions that surround your chosen topic. What do you think is interesting about your topic? Are there any controversies or debates about your topic?

### *Here's one way to move from a topic to a thesis statement:*

- a) Come up with a **topic**  
*Ex. homelessness*
- b) Decide on an **issue** that is related to your topic  
*Ex. causes of homelessness*
- c) Come up with a **research question** – something that can be argued  
*Ex. What are the causes of homelessness?*
- d) Develop your **working thesis**, based on preliminary research  
*Ex. The mortgage crisis, high unemployment rates, and a failing economy are the main causes of homelessness today.*

### *Here is another way to come up with a thesis statement:*

- a) First, choose your topic.  
*Ex. causes of homelessness*
- b) Then, consider what you already know about the topic.  
*Ex. I know that homeless shelters exist, people lose their homes because they foreclose on a mortgage or cannot pay rent, I've heard that those who are homeless are more affected by the economy because they can't get jobs, it's hard to find a job right now, anyone can become homeless,*
- c) Next, write a question that can be answered either **yes** or **no** about your subject. (If there is only one answer, the subject must be changed because you are only reporting a fact. If the question can be answered both **yes** and **no**, you are seeking an opinion, and you are on the right track.)  
*Ex. Are homeless people to blame for their situations?*
- d) The final answer (after your complete preliminary research) to this **yes / no** question is your thesis statement.  
*Ex. Although many people believe that homeless people are to blame for their situations, the mortgage crisis, high unemployment rates, and a failing economy are the main causes of homelessness today.*

**Note:** Remember that this is a working thesis. When you conduct further research, your thesis is likely to change. You might even have to abandon the original working thesis completely:

**Ex.** *Your working thesis is that A, B, and C are the main factors that lead to homelessness in America today. As you research, you realize that, actually, X, Y, and Z are the main factors.*

Here are two sites that can help you create a thesis statement:

[http://corptrain.phoenix.edu/thesis\\_generator/thesis\\_generator.html](http://corptrain.phoenix.edu/thesis_generator/thesis_generator.html)

<http://www.sdst.org/shs/library/thesis.html>

*The following may also help (excerpted and adapted from Duke's Writing Studio (<http://uwp.duke.edu/wstudio/>):*

Here are two different templates that can help you create a thesis statement. Try one or both of the following:

I am studying \_\_\_\_\_ because I want to find out  
\_\_\_\_\_ in order to understand  
\_\_\_\_\_.

In this paper, I will argue \_\_\_\_\_, based on the  
evidence of \_\_\_\_\_. This issue is  
important because \_\_\_\_\_.

**Evaluating your thesis statement:** Once you have a working thesis, ask yourself the following questions to help make your thesis even stronger: Is your thesis reasonable? contestable? significant? interpretive? specific?

Samples:

- ❖ **Contestable:** Intentionally writing a thesis that someone can disagree with may seem counterintuitive, but consider that if no one could possibly disagree with what you're arguing, there's little point in writing about it. Being able to acknowledge and refute counterarguments will strengthen your claim, not weaken it.
  - POOR: "To learn the Tango requires practice." Well, yeah, but so what? Why would readers want to read an argument in support of this claim if they already agree with it?
  - BETTER: "To learn the Tango, one must learn not only various steps but more importantly how to move with spontaneity—a skill that can be developed through practice." There is certainly room for disagreement in this claim (Is spontaneity really the most important aspect of the Tango? Can spontaneity be learned?); as a result, the revised thesis provides a much more interesting basis for discussion. The author is likely to support it more passionately than the first claim.
- ❖ **Specific:** Broad claims are more difficult to support effectively than focused claims. Specific claims also tend to provide readers with more useful information than broad claims.
  - POOR: "Changing the public school lunch menu to include better foods would be good for students." What constitutes "better food," and how would it benefit students? (By the way, is this claim **contestable**?)
  - BETTER: "Changing the public school lunch menu to include more fresh fruit, vegetables, and grains would both improve our students' health and raise their academic performance." (Often **specific** and **contestable** go hand-in-hand.)
- ❖ **Interpretive:** Does your thesis offer an interpretation of evidence or does it simply describe a situation?
  - POOR: "The United States is a federal system that divides governmental powers between national and state authorities." Rather than offering an interpretation, this sentence describes an incontestable fact. While it may have truth value, it makes a poor thesis statement.
  - BETTER: "The division of governmental authority inherent to the United States' federal system produces unnecessary competition between state and national jurisdictions. This division hinders the effectiveness of public policies at both levels of government." These two sentences (note that a thesis statement might be two sentences, not just one) offer readers an interpretation. They propose a specific relationship between a cause (i.e. the U.S. federal system) and its effects (i.e. less effective public policies), as well as the rationale behind the interpretation (i.e. competition between state and national authorities).