

THE THESIS

WHAT IS A THESIS?

A thesis is the specific point you are making and the position you are taking on the topic in your essay. Usually, your thesis statement will come at the end of your introduction.

A Simple Thesis Test: Read your thesis. If you can say *True* or *False*, *Yes* or *No*, or *I Agree* or *Disagree* about the claim you're making, then it is a thesis and not just a topic.

GETTING STARTED

Often the most difficult part of any writing project is getting started. Just because you have a topic does not mean you know what you want to say about it. The topic is the general subject you're writing about; the thesis is what you're saying about the topic. Moving from topic to thesis can be quite difficult. In the section below you'll find some techniques to help you narrow down your general topic to a specific thesis.

Free Writing: Write non-stop on your topic for a short time, say, 3 to 5 minutes. Write whatever comes into your head, without regard to grammar or sentence structure. If you can't think of anything to write, just keep writing, "I can't think of anything to write," over and over until you do think of something. The important thing is to keep writing.

Brainstorming: Make a list of everything you can think of on your topic. Don't try (at this stage) to organize your ideas, just let them flow.

Branching: Write your topic in the middle of a sheet of paper and draw a circle around it. Around this topic write down everything you can think of (your "ideas") related to that topic. Next, draw a line from each related idea to the topic. These "ideas" become your primary "branches." You can continue this process indefinitely by clustering new ideas around each primary branch.

Questioning: Write down all of the questions you have or think someone might have about your topic. You might start with the standard *Who*, *What*, *Where*, *Why*, *When*, and *How* questions.

EXAMPLES OF TOPICS AND THESES

TOPIC: Football

NARROWER TOPIC: The Super Bowl

THESIS: The Jets won the Super Bowl in 1969 because they had the best passing game, the best offensive line, and the best running game in either league.

TOPIC: World War II

NARROWER TOPIC: The Effects of World War II

THESIS: The Second World War was the most important event in the 20th century because it destroyed the last of the old political order in Europe, marked the beginning of the end of the European colonial empires, and ushered in a "cold war" from which we are only now starting to recover.

TOPIC: Cars

NARROWER TOPIC: American cars

THESIS: General Motors makes the best cars.

THE THREE-PART THESIS

A three-part thesis states the three reasons or arguments you will develop in your essay to support your thesis. Three-part theses give your reader an outline of your argument and help keep your paper focused. The theses in the first two examples above are three-part theses.

Pick out the theses from the list below:

1. Business Cycles.
2. The Star Wars Trilogy: Star Wars, The Empire Strikes Back, and Return of the Jedi.
3. Downsizing.
4. Shakespearean Characters who die in the third act.
5. John Locke's philosophy greatly influenced America's founding fathers.
6. The origins of baseball in central New York prior to the Civil War and its growth in popularity in the years after the War.
7. Ice cream v. cake
8. Moby Dick is the greatest American novel ever written because of its style, structure, and characterization.
9. The alien abduction of high government officials.

HOW ABOUT GIVING IT A TRY?

Below is a list of topics. Pick one or two of these and try to come up with a thesis using that topic. To do this you may want to use some of the techniques mentioned earlier, such as brainstorming or free writing:

The home-run race between Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa.

Going to the movies

My freshman year in college

My favorite vacation spot

Friendship

Using a computer

Television

Music

Censorship

Family Values

The Vietnam

War Olympic Sports

Below is a list of theses. See if you can come up with topics they may have been developed from. (Keep in mind that any given thesis may be related to more than one topic)

Cindy Crawford is the world's greatest model.

President Clinton has disgraced himself by lying under oath, misleading the American public in his speeches, and betraying his family.

Flint, Michigan is the most miserable city on the face of the earth.

Most people don't need to go to college.

You should save at least 10% of every paycheck.

Want more thesis help? Visit the ASC to meet with the English Specialist or a peer tutor.