

# Thesis Statements

## What is it?

Thesis statements are one of the most important aspects of academic writing. Your thesis statement tells your readers what to expect from your paper: what your position or question is, and the ways in which you will answer that question, or defend that position. The Writing Center at the University of North Carolina sums it up like this: “After a brief introduction of your topic, you state your point of view on the topic directly and often in one sentence. This sentence is the thesis statement, and it serves as a summary of the argument you’ll make in the rest of your paper” (University of North Carolina, n.d., para. 2).

## How do I develop a thesis statement?

Believe it or not, even though your thesis statement will be one of the first parts of your paper, it may be the last thing you actually write. As soon as you read your assignment, you might have an instant opinion about how you want to argue your case. However, an opinion does not a strong thesis make. Your opinion may fuel your research, but your thesis should be developed AFTER you conduct your research, gathering studies and experts’ opinions and evidence from reliable sources. Once you have done these things, after all, your opinion may change. From the evidence you gather, you can then state your informed position on the topic, and declare how you will go about proving that position is accurate or valid.

## Is my thesis strong?

**When reviewing your first draft and its working thesis, ask yourself the following:**

- **Do I answer the question?** Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
- **Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?** If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it’s possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
- **Is my thesis statement specific enough?** Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: why is something “good”; what specifically makes something “successful”?
- **Does my thesis pass the “So what?” test?** If a reader’s first response is likely to be “So what?” then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
- **Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?** If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It’s okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
- **Does my thesis pass the “how and why?” test?** If a reader’s first response is “how?” or “why?” your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.