IMPROVING YOUR THESIS STATEMENT

A good thesis statement will improve your paper.

For this video, we'll go over what the main purpose of a thesis is, and give some tips for how to create a good one.

PURPOSE OF A THESIS

So, what does a thesis statement do?

Your thesis is the main claim of your paper. Your whole paper should support the argument you make in your thesis. It acts as a guide for the readers, and lets them know what your paper will say.

A thesis is related to a research question. A research question defines what you are trying to find out about in your research, and should be the starting point for all your projects.

A thesis summarizes the answer to a research question, usually in one sentence. For example, for the research question "how are female characters portrayed in video games?" The thesis might be "Female video game characters are either helpless or heroic."

People often start their research with an idea about a tentative or working thesis. The tentative thesis is a summary of what you think the answer will be to your research question, based on what you know about it in advance. After you do some research, this thesis will most likely change based on what you discover. Our tentative thesis that female video game characters tend to be either helpless or heroic, might change in the final draft to include the fact that whether they are helpless or heroic they always have an attractive appearance.

FIVE TIPS FOR A GOOD THESIS

Now let's move on to how you can tell whether a thesis statement is good or not. We'll cover 5 tips.

First, your thesis needs to make an argument or an assertion. It isn't good enough to state what others think without taking a stand yourself, such as by saying "many researchers disagree about the impact of TV violence." Instead, you need to analyze the research you find, decide on your own opinion and state it, such as "watching TV violence normalizes violence for children."

It also isn't good enough to just state what you will cover in your paper, as in "this paper will discuss the health impacts of exercise." Instead, state a claim or argument about your topic. A better thesis would make a claim like "exercise has positive impacts on self-esteem in people with depression."

Second, your thesis needs to answer the "so what" question. Your argument needs to be interesting and complex enough to generate some discussion. An argument that spousal abuse is negative doesn't answer the 'so what' question. The argument is too obvious and is something everyone knows.

To improve this thesis, we could specify what negative consequences we mean, such as social problems for children who witness it. That argument is less obvious and has more scope for discussion.

Third, your thesis needs to be specific. "Global warming has many causes and effects" is not specific. "Many causes and effects" is too general, and doesn't give us a sense of what this paper will focus on. It is also so broad you could never cover everything in one paper.

One way to tell whether your thesis is specific is to give it the "how and why" test. Does the thesis give details on how something happens, or why it happens?

Another way is to check whether it specifies who, what, where, and when it is talking about. This one doesn't answer how or why, or have details about what, where, or when. It's much better to state "in the last 5 years, the Great Lakes have lost fish diversity due to global warming."

Fourth, your thesis should only contain one main idea. Sometimes when you've done a lot of research, you have many good ideas and want to fit them all in. It's better to focus on one and deal with it in depth. Instead of saying "advertising influences what children buy, and affects girls' body image," focus on just one of those two ideas. For example, "advertising has a negative impact on girls' body image."

Finally, make sure you can support your thesis, and that someone won't be able to disagree with it as soon as they see it. For example, you might feel that global warming is a myth, but using that as a thesis isn't a great idea. There is lots of evidence to the contrary, and lots of people would disagree. You can't just ignore that.

A better strategy is to acknowledge up front that there is evidence against your argument, and to make your thesis something that can be argued. For example, you could say that although there is evidence in support of global warming, some evidence shows those effects might be overstated.

SUMMARY

To summarize, a good thesis makes a statement or argument that is worth arguing and not just something everyone already knows. It's specific, includes only one main idea, and is something you can successfully argue.

It should also be a summary of your paper in one sentence. Everything in your paper should help support the argument you make in your thesis. Make sure your thesis meets all these criteria for better results in your paper.

QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK

If you have any questions, ask us at library.wlu.ca/help/askus.

Let us know whether or not this video was helpful. Go to library.wlu.ca/videofeedback to give us feedback and help us improve.