

DEVELOPING THE THESIS STATEMENT

Derived from the **Dartmouth Writing Project**
(www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student)

“The thesis sentence is typically that ONE sentence in the paper that asserts, controls, and structures the entire argument. Without a strong persuasive, thoughtful thesis, a paper might seem unfocused, weak, and not worth the reader’s time.”

While the characteristics of a strong thesis statement may vary across the disciplines, they all share the following traits:

1. A good thesis sentence will make a claim

Develop an interesting perspective that you can support and defend: e.g. “Americans are violent because they are fearful.” Such a claim draws interest because it elicits other points of view, for instance: Americans are violent because of violence portrayed in the media, or because of the disintegration of the family.

2. A good thesis sentence will control the entire argument

Each paragraph in your essay should be there to support your thesis. If a paragraph seems irrelevant to your thesis, then you have only one of two choices: get rid of the paragraph, or rewrite your thesis.

3. A good thesis will provide a structure for your argument

A good thesis not only signals *what* your argument will be, but *how* it will be presented.

The “working thesis”

In the process of research you may stumble across ideas and interesting aspects related to your topic that are not prepared for by your thesis, but which you would like to incorporate in your paper. Similarly, you may find a block in the writing process is due to some limitation in your thesis.

“A working thesis is a sentence you compose in order to make the work of writing easier... The working thesis need not be eloquent. In fact, it can be quite clunky, declaring your argument and then clumsily listing your supporting points. Not to worry: you’ll be revising your thesis, and often more than once.”

A working thesis is flexible; it accommodates what you learn as you go along; it evolves.

Please visit **The Dartmouth Writing Project** (www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student) for an online step-by-step guide to the development of a thesis statement. It could be very helpful!

In the end, ask yourself these questions:

- Does my thesis sentence attempt to answer (or at least explore) a challenging, intellectual question?
- Is the point I am making one that will generate discussion and argument, or is it one that will leave the reader asking, “So what?”
- Is my thesis too vague? Too general? Should I focus on some more specific aspect of my topic?
- Does my thesis indicate the direction of my argument? Does it suggest a structure for my paper?