

INSTITUTE WRITING PROGRAM

THE WRITING CENTER

Creating a Strong Thesis

A thesis is a clear and focused statement that must answer your assignment prompt. It tells your reader what your paper will argue, prove, or demonstrate. A strong thesis gives your reader a clear idea of what your paper will do and gives your reader a preview of the structure of the paper (like a trailer for a movie). A thesis should be:

- **Contestable:** Your thesis should not be a statement of accepted fact or a general summary of your topic. Your thesis should make an assertion or contestable claim with which a reasonable person might disagree. In other words, your thesis should introduce your reader to an idea or argument that needs proving, rather than a statement that your reader is likely to agree with.

Weak	Strong
<i>There are some negative and positive aspects to the Banana Herb Tea Supplement.</i>	<i>Although the Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• fails to take a stand• vague	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• takes a stand• specific

- **Appropriate:** Your thesis should respond to the questions and goals of the assignment. If the assignment asks you to respond to specific questions, your thesis should indicate the ways your paper will address those questions. If you are asked to select a specific text, topic, etc., your thesis should make it clear not only what your paper will focus on, but also what it will argue about that focus.
- **Focused:** Your thesis should map out the scope of your argument — it should let your reader know what will be addressed in the paper and should provide a specific enough argument that it can be addressed in the length of your paper. In other words, your thesis shouldn't promise to explain all the causes of World War I in five pages. Instead, it might examine one specific cause and explain why it is significant.

Weak	Strong
<i>World hunger has many causes and effects.</i>	<i>Hunger persists in Glandelinia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• world hunger can't be discussed thoroughly in seven to ten pages• Does not identify the specific causes and effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• narrows the subject to a more specific and manageable topic• identifies the specific causes for the existence of hunger



- **Identifiable:** Your reader should be able to locate your thesis within your introduction and identify it as your paper’s main argument. This does not mean that your thesis must be confined to one sentence — sometimes a longer or more complex argument requires more than one sentence.
- **Answers a how or why:** Try to develop a tentative thesis or a working hypothesis instead of providing a direct “what” statement. This can often be accomplished by the questions that you ask yourself as well as how you present ideas to your reader.

Weak	Strong
<i>The economic situation is bad.</i>	<i>The tax policies of the current administration promise to reduce the tax burden on the middle class by sacrificing education and health-care programs for everyone.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • broad noun • weak verb • vague adjective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific noun • action verb • assertive claim

Revising your thesis

In order to revise your thesis, you may find it helpful to make a reverse outline of your paper. Look back over you paper and ask yourself if the thesis reflects the organization of your paper? Is the scope of your thesis the same as that of your paper? Now you can revise your thesis with your answers in mind.

Thesis checklist	Yes	No
Does my thesis answer the assignment’s prompt?		
Is my thesis a claim that identifies a specific focus?		
Does it cover an appropriate scope for the length of the paper?		
Does it tell my reader what my paper argues, demonstrates, or proves?		
Does the thesis give my reader an accurate preview of the paper’s organization?		