

DEVELOPING A THESIS STATEMENT

Thesis: A statement in which a writer affirms or defends the specific idea that will focus or organize a paper. Your thesis will be in the introductory paragraph and should not be longer than two sentences.

1) Developing Your Thesis:

Answer the question: Your thesis statement should answer a question – either a question your professor has given you or one you make up for yourself based on the topic. For example:

Question: Write a 4-page paper assessing the impact of the Industrial Revolution on Europe.

To begin crafting an excellent thesis, begin by asking yourself “What *was* the impact of the Industrial Revolution on Europe? Was it positive or negative?”

From there, you can develop a working thesis. This is a preliminary answer to your paper’s question, which you can develop and revise as you continue your research.

Working thesis: The Industrial Revolution had a positive impact on Europe.

Be specific: Start narrowing your working thesis into something clearer and more concrete. Provide a specific claim that **answers your question** and, perhaps, provides the main **supporting arguments** from your paper.

An example of a clear and specific thesis statement looks something like this:

For better or worse, the Industrial Revolution cemented Europe’s dominance on the world stage for another century because it elevated the middle class, advanced the economic strength of kingdoms and nations, and paved the way for technological advances we both enjoy and *need* today.

Anticipate counter arguments: A counter argument is an opposing perspective that argues against the point you are trying to make. EVERY argument has a counter argument. If yours doesn’t, then it’s not an argument. A good thesis statement considers the counter arguments, and it might even create tension by including both arguments as part of the thesis with a phrase with “although,” “while,” or “despite.” For example:

Despite its abuses, the Industrial Revolution was ultimately beneficial for Europe because it elevated the middle class, advanced the economic strength of kingdoms and nations, and paved the way for technological advances we both enjoy and *need* today.

2). **Testing Your Thesis:** Once you’ve developed a clear and specific thesis, you can test it against these four criteria:



Is it Specific: Is your thesis specific? Does it avoid generalizations and vague assertions? Consider this example:

➡ Poor: **The First World War was bad for Europe.**
(Why? Provide the specific ways that the war was bad for Europe.)

➡ Better: ***The First World War was the beginning of Europe's decline because it devastated both the geographic and industrial wealth of the European powers, undermined the population of an entire generation, and produced civil unrest through the dissolution of Empires and the creation of new nation states.***

This thesis is much better. It doesn't simply state that the war was bad for Europe; it foreshadows the argument by briefly listing why.

Is it Arguable: A thesis statement is not a statement of fact. Nor should it depend on unprovable assumptions. The best thesis statements **argue for a position that can be challenged!**

➡ Poor: ***It is good to be nice.***
Not only is this vague, but it's obviously true. No one would argue against this.

➡ Better: ***Economic policies that depend on charity and altruism are historically better for societies compared to policies that depend on personal accumulation and monopoly, which proves that kindness is useful.***

This thesis is controversial: its success will depend on a good an argument.

Is it Interesting: Interest is infectious! If you are interested in the topic that you are arguing, your reader will likely pick up on that. Common ways to keep a thesis statement interesting is to challenge a widely held assumption or to provide significant developments in a particular field. The most interesting thesis statements will typically have implications on how we live beyond that specific paper/discipline.

➡ Poor: ***Dewdropix is a brand of medicine used for people who are unwell and should be readily available for those who need it.***

This thesis statement hints at an argument but does not "wow" the reader.

➡ Better: ***Contrary to popular belief, Dewdropix is a safe vaccine used for people who suffer from a highly contagious, highly fatal condition. Yet, despite its efficacy and simple implementation, its high cost prevents ease of access and suggests corporate interest is valued higher than individual wellbeing.***

This thesis contains an interesting, relevant argument that is specific and, if true, could have serious consequences.

Is it Defensible: Can your thesis be defended? That is, does it have evidence supporting it? A good thesis will be open to rational and empirical scrutiny, but it will stand because you have backed up your points with supporting evidence.

➡ Poor: ***Moose Tracks is a good flavour of ice cream.***

This thesis statement is arguable but not defensible. The only "evidence" you have is your opinion.

➡ Better: ***While eating ice cream excessively is not a healthy diet choice, the treat nevertheless has both nutritional and psychological benefits that should make it an occasional staple of one's weekly meal planning.***

This thesis would go on to be defended by facts about the vitamins within ice cream, the benefits of a cool treat on a summer day, etc.