

Developing a Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement should argue your main claim--the position you want readers to accept--and your reason(s). Starting with your first draft, it very helpful to have a working thesis statement to guide your writing process. As your ideas develop across drafts, you should revise the thesis statement to make it a complete, clear, and precise statement of your final position.

Your thesis claim should meet the following tests:¹

Test One: Is the thesis claim **arguable**; can reasonable people disagree with it?
Note that this test excludes fanatic, fully-accepted, and trivial claims.

Test Two: Can the claim **be proven wrong** (disconfirmed), at least in theory?

Test Three: Is the claim **reasonable**; is it feasible, ethical, and prudent?

Thesis sentences that meet these tests:

“Jane Austen’s use of letters allows her to relay key narrative information in a concise and engaging way.”

“Due to the central role of honeybees in citrus tree pollination, the Florida Department of Agriculture should ban pesticides affecting honeybees.”

The final version of your thesis should be a complete, clear, and precise expression of your main claim and your reasons for it. **To develop your thesis, consider adding a subordinate phrase or clause to show the relationship between the main claim and reasons.** Make your logic clear to your reader. The specific logic of the relationship between the main and the subordinate ideas determines how to link your claim and reasons. Words commonly used to introduce subordinate ideas include *after, although, because, despite, if, in order to, once, since, unless, until, when, and while*.

Examples:

To show **causality**:

“*Because of* their emphasis on the broad impact of individual decisions, environmentalists exhibit values consistent with the American tradition of civic mindedness.”

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¹ Joseph M. Williams and Gregory G. Colomb, *The Craft of Argument, Concise Edition* (New York: Longman Press, 2002): 81-83.

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To show **concession**:

“*Despite* genetic similarity among the four Galapagos tortoise subspecies, the small-bodied tortoise is not believed to be the direct ancestor of the modern day giants.”

“*Despite* slight differences in body size, egg size, and development time, the two cricket species are almost morphologically identical.”

Additional suggestions for thesis development

Use **specific, precise language**:

Use **qualifiers to show probability or frequency rather than absolute certainty**:

Common qualifiers include *frequently, many, most, recent, some, usually, probably*.

“Some recent structural studies of the hippocampus provide evidence to support the Sissinghurst model.”

Explain **what kinds of evidence, effects, differences, etc.**:

“Post-Civil War political rivalries between the north and the south have contributed to today’s disagreements over state versus federal power.”

Show **how**:

“Using both the pulpit and the purse, the Catholic Church greatly influenced the labor movement in the U. S. at the end of the nineteenth century.”

For further discussion of thesis statements, see other Writing Center handouts:

“Introductions and Thesis Statements”

“The Third Deadly Sin: Wordiness”

“Sentence Revision” (wordiness)

Sources:

Williams, Joseph, and Gregory Colomb. *The Craft of Argument, Concise Edition*. New York: Longman Press. 2002.