The Writing Center @ EOU

Tips for Writing a Strong Thesis

The First Steps

1. Start by reviewing your prompt. What is the purpose of this paper? What are you trying to accomplish? How do you feel about this topic?

2. Next, take a stance. Consider how you feel about the topic and make a specific claim or argument. If there is a question directly posed in the prompt, then answer it.

3. Provide support for your claim. What specific evidence are you going to use to validate your argument? How, specifically, are you planning to convince your reader that they should believe your claim is right?

4. After developing the body of your paper, revisit and revise your thesis. Is your thesis still representative of your claim? Does it still accurately explain how you supported your argument?

What if these steps don't seem to work for you?

Try skipping steps 2 and 3. Assess the prompt of your paper and then try to begin writing the body of your paper. In some cases and for some people, it is much easier to write an effective thesis after having first completed a draft of the body paragraphs. Remember, a thesis is supposed to serve as a "map" for the content of your paper. Most cartographers would agree that it's a lot easier to draw an accurate map if you do the exploration first.

Do's and Don'ts

Do answer the question posed in the prompt.
Don't use a rhetorical question in place of a thesis.

Do present factual evidence as support for your argument.
Don't state an obvious fact as your thesis.

Do take a position that you feel strongly about on an issue.
Don't limit your thesis to stating your opinion.

Do provide specific examples.
Don't be vague, abstract, or overly general.

Strategies for Improving a Working Thesis

Does it mention a prominent counterargument?
One way to improve a thesis is to refer to a leading counterargument to your claim. For instance, imagine that you are writing about removing wolves from the endangered species list in some areas. You could draft a thesis that states:

> Although in the past unprotected wolves have been hunted to near extinction, they should be removed from the endangered species list due to their current populations, the impact they have on livestock, and their growing encroachment on cities.

By acknowledging the counterargument that wolves were severely hunted in the past, you build credibility regarding your claim and catch the attention of a reader who may be skeptical about your stance.

Do your topic sentences and paragraphs link back to your thesis?

Once you have a draft of your paper you should verify that each of your paragraphs addresses the claim you make in your thesis. You can start by reviewing your topic sentences to be sure that they relate to the points you presented in your thesis. In the event that these ideas do not match up, it is typically easier to revise your thesis than to restructure the content of your body paragraphs and topic sentences.

Sample Theses
(From The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill)

Weak Thesis:
The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.

Strong Thesis:
While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.

Weak Thesis:
Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is a great American novel.

Strong Thesis:
Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's Huckleberry Finn suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature.

References: The Writing Center at UNC-Chapel Hill, Purdue Online Writing Lab, Harvard College Writing Center, Indiana University Bloomington Writing Tutorial Services