

Thesis Statements

Any paper you write in college will require a thesis statement in some form. These are general expectations and guidelines for writing and revising a strong thesis.

Basics

Roles of a Thesis: A thesis (1) *answers a question*, (2) *makes an argument*, and (3) *presents a road map for the rest of your paper*.

Thesis Components: A thesis is comprised of a *topic* and a *comment on the topic* and answers the questions: *What? Why? How?*

Generally, the comment portion is your argument; however, if a prompt is simply expository or analytical, you can still give a comment on how you are explaining or analyzing the topic. Since most college essays are argumentative in nature, we will focus on constructing analytical theses.

Thesis Conventions: The thesis typically appears at the end of your first paragraph (introduction), is 1-3 sentences long, and avoids first person (unless the writer is instructed otherwise).

Examples with Notes

1) In the "Ethics of Living Jim Crow," Richard Wright fights segregation [what] by using irony [how] to show that Jim Crow's "ethics" are unethical [why].

- a. Topic: Richard Wright's "Ethics of Living with Jim Crow"...
- b. Comment: ...shows Jim Crow "ethics" are unethical.

2) The film *Rebel without a Cause* reflects the anxieties surrounding changing family values in 1950s America [what]. The main conflicts are set against the "dysfunctional" family lives of the characters Jim, Judy, and Plato [how] to show the danger of these degrading values and a desire to return to a traditional family structure [why].

- a. Topic: *Rebel without a Cause*...
- b. Comment: ...reflects anxieties about changing family values.

3) Because of the change in demographics and population distribution across the United States (how), the Electoral College no longer realizes its original intention of ensuring fair representation (why) and should be abandoned or altered to give more power to the popular vote (what).

- a. Topic: The Electoral College...
- b. Comment: ...should be abandoned.

For all three examples above, notice that the *how* and *why* elements make the paper more specific and argumentative than if the writer had just introduced the topic to be discussed.

Build Your Thesis

Working Thesis: Your working thesis is your tentative topic plus your comment on that topic.

Example: The Electoral College should be abandoned.

Your Topic: _____

Comment: _____

Working thesis: _____

Revised Thesis: Your revised thesis is a more complex, specific version of your working thesis and considers the questions *why* and *how*.

Example: Because of the change in demographics and population distribution, the Electoral College no longer realizes its original intention of ensuring fair representation and should be abandoned or altered to give more power to the popular vote.

Your Working Thesis: _____

Why? _____

How? _____

Revised Thesis: _____

NOTE: Your final version of your thesis will go through several revisions. You may find that you need to actually write out your body paragraphs before you refine your final thesis.

Thesis Checklist

- Does your thesis address all of the prompt?
 - o What is the question that your thesis seeks to answer? Are there more than one?
- Does it make a claim/argument? Could someone argue against it?
 - o Try to write about something that is not obvious; bring something new to the table. Discussing the topic with someone can help you find a more interesting angle.
- Can you support your thesis with evidence?
 - o Sometimes it helps to collect your sources and do some brainstorming before settling on an argument.
- Is it specific? Is there any way you can make it more specific?
 - o Think about times, places, and names. Ask yourself what questions someone might have about the details of your thesis.
- Does it answer the questions *what*, *how*, and *why*?
 - o The *how's* are typically the main sub points used to organize your paper, and you can usually find the *why* in your analysis and conclusion.
- Does your thesis represent what your paper is actually about?
 - o Sometimes our ideas change while we write. Don't be afraid to revise your thesis throughout the editing process to better reflect your ideas.