Working Thesis Statements

# Selecting Your Focus

An effective essay needs a clear notion of the main purpose or a definite plan of how to begin and where to go. To avoid the problem of roaming from one unrelated idea to another, you first need to formulate a working thesis statement.

# First, What Does a Thesis Do?

The thesis statement declares the main point or controlling idea of your entire essay. Frequently located near the beginning of a short essay, the thesis briefly answers the questions, "What is my opinion on subject 'x'?" and "What am I going to argue or explain in this essay?"

# So, What is a “Working” Thesis?

A working thesis statement should be composed before you begin you first rough draft and is perhaps your single most useful organizational tool. Once you write down your essay's main point, you can arrange the rest of your paper to explain and support it. Everything in your essay should support your thesis. Try writing your thesis statement at the top of your first draft and referring to it often: your chances of drifting away from your purpose should be reduced.

It is important for you to notice that there may be a difference between the working thesis that appears in your rough draft(s) and your final thesis statement. As you begin writing, you may have one main idea in mind that surfaced from your prewriting activities, but as you write, you discover that what you really want to write about is slightly different. That's fine! Writing is an act of discovery and writing down our ideas helps to identify what we truly mean to say or argue. You should modify your working thesis if your paper has taken a new, better direction. Just remember that if you do change your paper's topic or purpose, go back and revise your thesis so that it is consistent with the body of your essay.

Write your working thesis here, and then turn this sheet over for additional tips and practice:

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# What is a Good Thesis?

1. **A good thesis states the writer's clearly defined opinion on some subject.**
2. **A good thesis asserts one main idea.** Many essays drift into confusion because the writer is trying to explain or argue two different, large issues in one essay.
3. **A good thesis has something worthwhile to say.**
4. **A good thesis appeals to many readers**. Try to select a subject that will interest, amuse, challenge, persuade, or enlighten your readers.
5. **A good thesis is limited to fit the assignment.** Your thesis should show that you've narrowed your subject matter to an appropriate size for your essay. Do not allow your thesis to produce more of a discussion than you can adequately deliver in a short essay. Focus your essay on an important part of a broader subject that interests you.
6. **A good thesis is clearly stated in specific terms.** More than anything, a vague thesis reflects lack of clarity in the writer's mind and inevitably leads to an essay that talks around the subject but never makes a coherent point. Try to avoid words whose meanings are imprecise or those that depend largely upon personal interpretation.
7. **A good thesis is clearly located, often in the first paragraph of an essay.**

Does the thesis you wrote on the front do all of these tasks? If not, revise it until you have a strong working thesis.

# Practice Writing a Working Thesis

Explain why the following are not clear and rewrite them:

1. Applying for a job can be a negative experience.

2. There are many advantages and disadvantages to the county's new voting machines.

3. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s had a tremendous effect on this country.

4. Nuclear power should be banned as an energy source in this country