

WRITE A GREAT THESIS!

DEVELOPING A GREAT THESIS is a necessary skill when entering an academic writing context.

While a thesis does not spring out of thin air, writers can coax a great thesis out of their gathered research, ideas and questions.

GETTING STARTED

If your assignment is a question, try starting with your answer to that question.

Select a topic that interests you and brainstorm questions about that topic.

Make a list of keywords or ideas you want to explore in your essay and try grouping them in different ways. Does a pattern emerge?

Look for interesting similarities and contrasts between the subjects you want to write about. Do they do the same kind of work in different ways? Or do they use the same method but with completely different outcomes? Does a pattern emerge?



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DEFINING A THESIS

THE ROAD MAP

Usually found in the last sentences of the introductory paragraph, a thesis statement represents the main point or argument at the heart of an academic or positional essay, essentially, what you intend to prove. Like a roadmap for both reader and writer, a thesis clearly establishes the topic of the essay, the writer's position and a brief direction for the paper.

A RESEARCH QUESTION

While a thesis in a finished paper will be succinctly and carefully written, usually writers begin developing their papers by creating a working thesis. Most theses get their start as research questions. A research question might act as a pre-thesis and should have specific elements that are investigable.

Questions to ask:

Is it debatable?

Can you imagine a counter argument?

Is the topic too broad?

Have other people taken this approach?

Does this thesis open up new space for research or discussion?

A THESIS EXPLAINED

GOOD THESIS EXAMPLE:

While some believe Andy Warhol's work was purely a celebration of commercialism, a close reading of his use of colour and repetition in his Marilyn Diptych reveals a subtle critique of the celebrity culture.

This is a clear statement of the topic: the relationship between the work of Andy Warhol: "some believe Andy Warhol's work was purely a celebration of commercialism"

The 'road-map' portion, "a close reading of his use of colour and repetition in his Marilyn Diptych" tells the reader to anticipate a paragraph on use of colour and one on repetition.

The "reveals a subtle critique of celebrity culture" is a clear position to take in a paper that is open for debate and further inquiry.

NOT A THESIS:

Andy Warhol was an artist in the 1960s.

This is a fact that cannot be debated. The topic is also too broad! It could fill a book (and has). It's better to focus on a specific aspect or point of interest within a topic.

NOT A THESIS:

Andy Warhol is my favourite artist.

This is supportable and might make a good topic for a personal narrative, but it's too specific for an academic essay and doesn't open up avenues for research or argument outside your own reactions.

SUMMARY:

A successful thesis is specific, research-based, and debatable. When in doubt, run these filters through your mind to determine whether your idea is a thesis or not.