A thesis is the main argument of an essay. It is probably the single most important part of an academic paper because it directs the organization, evidence integration and analysis. The quality of the entire paper hinges on the thesis, so if your thesis is boring or obvious, the rest of the paper probably will be too.

Three Characteristics of a Thesis

• Argumentative - In writing a thesis, the student is arguing for a certain interpretation or understanding of your subject. Therefore, a thesis becomes a position one is taking on a subject and it cannot be obvious or factual.

• Specific – When creating a thesis, make sure to be as specific about your position and the reasoning behind your ideas. The specificity of a thesis should fit with the length of paper one writes. Can your thesis be completely proven in the length of your paper?

• Important – Even though students write thesis statements for class papers, they are required to identify why a thesis is significant. Why are you writing this thesis? How will it affect your main topic or subject? Why is it important or significant? How will your thesis effect

Tips for Writing a Thesis

• Go beyond the Obvious - A thesis statement should not be common knowledge or an already accepted fact on the subject. Instead, aim to write an original idea that instructs the reader.

• Avoid Bias – This statement cannot include your own personal opinions, preferences, or biases. Rather, a thesis is formed through the close scrutiny of your research or sources so derive a statement through them.

• Always Start with the Evidence – When creating a thesis, make sure you have thoroughly read and understood your research for the paper. Since your thesis is an interpretation, you will use your evidence to support your position. If you come up with a thesis before reading your research, you will have a hard time finding the right support for your paper.

• Include ALL of your Ideas – Make sure that the thesis provides all of the major ideas included in the paper. Do not save ideas for the end of a paper to “surprise” your reader. The thesis needs to be a roadmap, so make sure all points of interest are included. Remember to also REVISE your thesis if your ideas change.
Creating a Thesis

- Take a Stance: When your research identifies multiple perspectives on a topic, you can argue for the one you feel works best. Make sure to explain your position.

- Compare/Contrast: When illustrating the similarities or differences between two objects, make sure your comparisons lead to a conclusion. What are the results?

- Cause or Effect: Consider the cause or root of your topic. Was a car accident simply driver error or fatigue? What about our society causes so many people to fall asleep behind the wheel? Do we live in a culture where exhaustion is promoted? Why? You can also discuss the effects of you topic. If obesity leads to disease, what does this suggest about policy, laws, or education?

- Evaluate: Determine whether something is desirable or undesirable, ethical or unethical, effective or ineffective, etc. Or is it is somewhere in-between?

- Propose: Suggest a necessary action to take, or a solution for a problem.

Revising a Thesis

Each of the thesis statements below require revision. Imagine you are writing a thesis statement for an advertisement campaign. How do you know how to fix your mistakes? Check out the examples and explanations below:

1. Too Vague and Factual – “Advertisements use images and colors to catch consumer’s attention.”
   Why? The sentence does not identify the specific advertisement the student will use in the paper. Also, the words “image” and “colors” need more specificity. Finally, all advertisements use images and colors to catch consumer attention so this thesis is really a fact, not argument.

2. Too much Bias – “In this ad, Doritos promises to offer us a good life by using color and bold imagery.”
   Why? While the statement is argumentative, the position of the thesis is too biased because the word “good” is not concrete. Also, the pronoun “us” includes the writer and thus makes the statement about both the writer and others.

3. Not Arguable – “This ad uses bold contrasting colors to promote its product, Doritos.”
   Why? Instead of taking a position or interpreting the advertisement, this statement merely tells readers what the add DOES. Therefore, this statement is descriptive and not argumentative. In order to revise, consider asking HOW or WHY the ad makes these choices. The writer can also identify the results or consequences of this description. Was the use of colors successful?