



Thesis and Argument Tips + Examples

Your paper should have a clear thesis in the first paragraph (or very close to it). A thesis is a summary statement of the argument of your paper. The thesis should present a clear, original, and engaging or interesting argument, and not simply mention or describe the topic of the paper (remember: the topic of a paper is the larger framework and the thesis is the more specific argument you are making about that topic).

Thesis statements are also not statements of fact. If you present an idea that is very well-known or self-evident, you may not have a strong enough thesis or argument of your own. The thesis does not necessarily have to be contentious, but it should present an idea that allows for some critical “space” for discussion or disputation. Successful theses include a perceptive observation about the issue or text at hand and an argument about the significance of that observation.

Here are some examples that contrast a weaker, descriptive thesis with a stronger, argumentative one:

- *Weaker (descriptive) thesis:* Sexuality is evident in the public persona of female pop stars.
- *Stronger (more argumentative) thesis:* In order to reach the top tier of commercial success, female pop stars need to present highly sexualized public personas.

- *Weaker (descriptive) thesis:* In this paper, I will explore the use of water imagery in Genesis, considering the many different ways such images are used in the text.
- *Stronger (more argumentative) thesis:* In this paper, I will argue that shifts in water imagery in Genesis mirror the changing relationship of the people to God.

- *Weaker (descriptive) thesis:* In “Previous Condition,” Baldwin highlights the negative effects of oppression for African Americans.
- *Stronger (more argumentative) thesis:* In “Previous Condition,” James Baldwin highlights the oppressive factors that lead to double consciousness and force African Americans to code switch, a behavior that results in unwanted passivity, crippling identity issues, and self-hate.

- *Weaker (descriptive) thesis:* The Combahee River Collective created a statement that emphasized collective experience.
- *Stronger (more argumentative) thesis:* The multilayered analysis offered by the Combahee River Collective ultimately advances coalitional politics, as it provides grounds for those with disparate experiences to relate across difference by viewing their identities as interconnected.