

What is a thesis?

A thesis statement declares what you believe and what you intend to prove. A good thesis statement makes the difference between a thoughtful research project and a simple retelling of facts.

A good tentative thesis will help you focus your search for information. But don't rush! You must do a lot of background reading before you know enough about a subject to identify key or essential questions. You may not know how you stand on an issue until you have examined the evidence. You will likely begin your research with a working, preliminary or tentative thesis which you will continue to refine until you are certain of where the evidence leads.

The thesis statement is typically located at the end of your opening paragraph. (The opening paragraph serves to set the context for the thesis.)

Remember, your reader will be looking for your thesis. Make it clear, strong, and easy to find.

Attributes of a good thesis:

- It should be contestable, proposing an arguable point with which people could reasonably disagree. A strong thesis is provocative; it takes a stand and justifies the discussion you will present.
- It tackles a subject that could be adequately covered in the format of the project assigned.
- It is specific and focused. a strong thesis proves a point without discussing "everything about...." instead of music, think "American jazz in the 1930s" and your argument about it.
- It clearly asserts your own conclusion based on evidence. Note: Be flexible. The evidence may lead you to a conclusion you didn't think you'd reach. It is perfectly okay to change your thesis!
- It provides the reader with a map to guide him/her through your work.
- It anticipates and refutes the counter-arguments.
- It avoids vague language (like "it seems").
- It avoids the first person. ("I believe," "In my opinion")
- It should pass the So What? or Who cares? test (Would your most honest friend ask why he should care or respond with "but everyone knows that"?). For instance, "people should avoid driving under the influence of alcohol," would be unlikely to evoke any opposition.