

Crafting the Thesis Statement or Hypothesis

To craft a thesis statement brainstorm and develop an idea, observation, or argument about a specific topic and then find relationships between known facts and your idea, observation, or argument.

A thesis (or a hypothesis) is an overarching statement that guides the research and writing of a paper. Stated within the introduction of the paper, it also tells the reader what to expect; it offers the scope, purpose, and direction of your paper.

A strong thesis is:

- Specific
- Focused - deals with one major idea
- Defendable - can be supported by relevant evidence
- Not obvious

A strong thesis statement focuses both the writer and reader. From it, you develop your research questions that further refine the topic and help create the body of the paper. Evidence to support the thesis must be presented in a logical and clear fashion that either defends or illustrates your thesis using cause and effect, argument, evaluation, comparison, or a combination of these.

A hypothesis is similar to a thesis. According James Lester in *Writing Research Papers*, “A hypothesis is a theory that must be tested in the lab, in literature, and/or by field research to prove its validity.” Hypotheses are theoretical, conditional, relational, or causal. The research paper may ultimately disprove the hypothesis, but disproving a theory is as important as proving one.

Sample of a weak working thesis: Poverty is the root cause of “failure to thrive” and lack of achievement in an academic environment.

While this statement likely has evidence that could support it concerning the effect of poverty on academic achievement, it is weak because it is too broad; it is not specific or detailed enough to achieve a proper focus. Why is poverty a cause of failure to thrive? What is meant by “failure to thrive” and “lack of achievement”? What academic level is involved?

Stronger working thesis: The constant lack of academic and economic resources experienced by children raised in poverty is the common denominator among first-generation college students who struggle to stay in school and is a stronger predictor for lack of achievement or retention in higher education than race or ethnic background.

This statement is a stronger working thesis because it takes a more definitive stand on the subject of poverty and achievement as a common denominator for struggling first-generation college students. It also specifically identifies achievement and retention in higher education as the scope of the paper and will compare issues of poverty to those of race and ethnicity. It also more clearly identifies issues that can be developed into research questions to further flesh out the statement. Research may further focus and define this statement, but it is a good working thesis to get the paper started.

The UNC Writing Center has excellent online handouts for creating a thesis plus other writing resources. Below is a summary of their *Thesis Test* from a handout on how to determine a good thesis: (<https://writingcenter.unc.edu/files/2012/09/Thesis-Statements-The-Writing-Center.pdf>)

Thesis Test: (UNC, 2012)

- Do I answer the assigned question?
- Have I taken a position others might challenge or oppose?
- Is my thesis specific enough? (a clue to a weak thesis is using words such as *good* or *successful*; be more specific- why is it good, what makes it successful)
- Does it pass the *so what* test?
- Does research support it?
- Does it pass the *how* and *why* test? (does the reader ask how or why when reading your thesis? If so, it is not specific enough)

Start with a working thesis to guide your research but accept that your thesis may change. Be willing to reassess and revise either your thesis or your writing to reflect what your research uncovers.