



Thesis Recognition and Formulation

Thesis Recognition: All essays have theses. **The thesis of an essay is its primary assertion or argument.** When reading any essay, ask yourself: “What is the main point this author is trying to get across?” The answer to this question is the author’s thesis. It is usually found clearly stated in the essay’s introduction; traditionally it is the last sentence.

Thesis Formulation: During the process of your research, you will formulate the answer to your leading question. A one-sentence version of this answer will be your thesis statement. Your thesis statement plays a pivotal role in your essay. All of the information you discuss must relate clearly back to your thesis statement. In fact, **the entire purpose of your essay is to explain and support your thesis.** By determining a clear thesis statement, you will give focus to your essay and make your argument clear for your reader.

Three Characteristics of a Good Thesis:

- 1) **Specific Subject:** Avoid broad topics. Narrow your discussion to specific items, people, or situations.

Example:

American Civil War > President Lincoln > Emancipation Proclamation
(large topic) (specific person) (specific act of Lincoln)

President Lincoln gave the Emancipation Proclamation as a strategy for winning the Civil War, not because he wanted to free the slaves.

(specific argument about Lincoln’s motive for his action)

- 2) **Clarity:** Avoid vague assertions by defining generic words such as important, interesting, influence, difficult, society, media, good, bad, we...

Unclear: Our thoughts are influenced by the media.

Revised: The number of commercials an average American is exposed to on a daily basis contributes to frivolous consumerism.

- 3) **Originality:** Don’t simply state your topic or a fact. Present an original, specific argument that demonstrates your angle on the subject.

Unoriginal: The rain forest is an important resource.

Revised: The destruction of the rain forest and the thousands of unidentified species within it will delay the cure for cancer.

Note: Have pride in your ideas. Don’t second-guess your statements by using “perhaps,” “probably,” or “seems like.” Remember, the first word in “authority” is “author” and you are the authority in your writing.