

What is a Thesis?

College-level papers nearly always require a thesis. There are two different kinds of theses.

- 1. A call to action.** A thesis of this type is NOT appropriate for most academic coursework but may be required of you in the working world. A call-to-action attempts to persuade the audience to take a specific course of action. It often includes the words “should,” “recommend,” “must,” etc. Magazine articles and blogs that offer advice fall into this category, as do political pieces that ask their readers to vote a certain way. Promotional materials that recommend goods and services also fall into this category. These “calls to action” tend to lack paradox and irony.
- 2. Analytic thesis.** Academic theses are *analytic*, meaning that they involve analysis. You can analyze just about anything: a text, an image, or an idea. An analytic thesis explains a relationship, cause, effect, process, or classification that is not immediately obvious. To arrive at an analytic thesis, you must know your subject material well. You must examine it until you spot a relationship, cause, effect, process, or until you make classification a casual observer is unlikely to notice. The ideal analytic thesis *challenges common assumptions* and offers a new way of looking at its subject. Often it does this by making connections between various sources.

How do I Know if I Have a Thesis?

- Your thesis is **debatable**, meaning that a reasonable person might disagree.
- Your thesis does not restate common opinions but **contradicts** them.
- Your thesis is **supportable**. You can find evidence supporting your claim.
- Your thesis **adds** something unique to the conversation around your subject. You’re not restating what others have said but contributing something of your own.

Help, I’m Having Trouble Coming up with a Thesis!

Try the following.

1. Add a new source. You may not have enough reading material. Add another source that approaches your topic from a different angle, and see how it interacts with what you have already read.
2. Determine what all your sources say that is the same. Where do your sources agree? You might find that together, your sources all point towards a claim that none of them have specifically made.
3. Determine where the sources disagree or are approaching the material from very different angles. What different assumptions lead to the disagreement? Where do you fall in the debate?
4. Consider the implications of your sources’ arguments in new contexts. Can you extend an argument in a new direction?

What if my Thesis Changes?

Let's *hope* that your thesis changes! The writing process reveals our thinking to ourselves; often we don't know what we think until we write it. This means that often our thesis changes as we write. There's even a term for this: an "evolving thesis." Most professional writers use evolving theses; it's part of why they complete multiple drafts. While changing your thesis does involve extra work (you will need to reorganize the paper for your next draft--completing a reverse outline may assist in this process), it is a *very good sign*. Generally, the second (or third, or fourth) thesis you end up with is much better than your first.

>>Revisit your research question. See how many possible theses you can come up with in response.