

# Thesis Workshop

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Having trouble finding or developing a strong thesis for your paper? This presentation will walk you from idea to thesis in a few simple steps.

# Why are you writing?

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- Think:
  - Every piece of writing has a **purpose**.
  - The purpose may be to entertain, enlighten, inform, or anything in-between.
- Do:
  - Get out a piece of paper.
  - Write down, using as many or as few words as necessary, why you are writing.
  - “Because the instructor told me to” might be the reason you are writing, but it isn’t your purpose.



# Examples of purpose statements

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- “I am writing to warn people about the dangers of heroin.”
- “My paper will tell an interesting story about my life.”
- “When finished reading, my reader should be able to tell the difference between Freudian psychoanalysis and Rogerian psychotherapy.”
- What is your purpose?

# What are you writing about?

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- Do you have your purpose written down?
- In addition to a purpose, each paper should have a topic or main idea.
- A topic is a central thought or event. The entire paper uses this topic to fulfill the purpose.
- On the same sheet of paper, write down your topic.
  - Be as specific or as general as you wish
  - Topics can always be narrowed or broadened as your research progresses






# Examples of topic statements

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## Topic

## Comments

- Technology  • This topic is a bit broad. What aspect of technology will you discuss?
- The use of the FLM 1000 flat sorting machine in rural post offices in the year 2005  • Perhaps too narrow. Will you find enough information to complete your assignment?
- Use of letter sorting machines in US post offices in the 20<sup>th</sup> century  • A good median between the two options above

# What do you want to say?

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- Most academic writing requires a claim or thesis.
- A claim or thesis:
  - Narrows your subject to the central idea you want the reader to learn or see
  - Makes a specific point about the topic
  - Conveys your purpose
- If you don't easily think of a thesis, don't worry. A thesis often begins as an answer to a question or a small seed of an idea.



# Writing a Thesis Statement

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- Your thesis will make a claim about your topic.
- On a sheet of paper, write your topic. Now, below or next to the topic, write down what you want the reader to know about the topic.
- Suppose your topic was martial arts training for children, and you want the reader to know that martial arts training is beneficial for children, this statement is the beginning of your thesis.
- Before you continue, make sure you have written down your topic and a claim about your topic. The next few slides will help you revise your thesis.

# Does your thesis state an opinion?

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- A thesis statement should be debatable, not a statement of fact.
- For example, “the United States Constitution was ratified by nine of the thirteen colonies” is a statement of fact.
- We can make our sample thesis debatable by adding a claim or opinion: “the ratification of the U.S. Constitution resulted from an aggressive, bipartisan negotiation style we could use in Congress today.”
- Our new thesis is a claim that we can imagine someone disagreeing with: “the founders were able to negotiate because they agreed on a vision of government, but we have lost this common ground.”
- How could you add an opinion to your thesis?



# Is your thesis limited to one claim?

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- If you answered “no” to this question, take a few moments to check your purpose and topic. Are they sufficiently narrow?
- If your topic and purpose are sufficiently narrow, list the separate claims you are making and decide which one best fits your topic and purpose.
- Suppose my purpose is to persuade and my thesis says, “martial arts are beneficial for children because they teach discipline, athleticism, and self-defense.” My thesis has multiple (hidden) claims because there are multiple martial arts.
- A better thesis might be: “karate is beneficial for children because it teaches discipline, athleticism, and self-defense.” There is still room for improvement, however, because there are many kinds of children and many types of karate.
- How do the length of the assignment and the research you do help limit your thesis to a single claim?

# Where's the purpose?

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- Consider the following thesis: “there are many reasons to enroll a child in karate class.”
- Does this statement indicate whether the author intends to persuade or explain? Does it indicate whether this training is good or bad?
- How does your thesis imply your purpose?
- A note: writing instructors and tutors are constantly lecturing students to “show, not tell.” Communicating your purpose is best done by implying your purpose rather than stating it outright. Thesis statements that begin with “I will argue...” or “I will show...” should be avoided.



# Thesis Thoughts

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- In the next few slides, you will have the chance to test your thesis-building skills.
- Each slide will present a potential thesis.
- Read each thesis carefully; what is good about the thesis? What about the thesis isn't quite right?
- Compare your responses with the responses provided.

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In “The Yellow Wallpaper,” Gilman shows the oppression of women.

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This thesis could be narrowed and more argumentative. Is Gilman’s argument convincing or unconvincing? Does she show the oppression of all women or certain women with certain needs in a certain time?



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Technology has its good points and its bad points.

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A good topic should be narrow enough to easily discuss while avoiding confusion. The topic “technology” is too broad.

A good thesis should make a single, debatable claim about the topic. There are two claims here: good and bad. The writer does not take a position.

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Success is being satisfied with your life.

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There is a circularity to this thesis that indicates the writer has not yet taken a firm position. “Success” and “being satisfied” almost feel like synonyms for each other. How could the author limit her definition of success? What debatable position might she take on success?



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Aggression usually leads to violence, injury, and even death, and we should use it constructively.\*

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While debatable, this thesis begs the question “what is constructive use of violence?” An entire essay could easily be devoted to this part of the thesis alone, yet this question must be answered before the rest of the thesis can make sense. How might the author limit this thesis to a single claim?

\*Aaron, Jane E. *Little, Brown Brief with Tabs*. Custom Edition for East Central College, 2014. p. 19.

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How can we pass gun control legislation that respects the Second Amendment and recognizes the dangers of guns in the hand of certain individuals?

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A thesis should usually be a statement, not a question. An answer to this question, however, could be a good thesis if the writer can limit the topic.



# Results

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- You should now have a thesis statement that makes a **single, debatable** claim that **implies** your **purpose** in writing.
- If you are still struggling, stop by The Learning Center or call 636-584-6688 to schedule a consultation with a professional writing tutor. All consultations are provided free of charge to East Central College students.