

DEVELOP A THESIS

A **thesis** is the main point or argument of an information source. Many, but not all, writing assignments require a thesis.

A strong thesis is:

Arguable:

Can be supported by evidence and analysis, and can be disagreed with.

Unique:

Says something new and interesting.

Concise and clear:

Explained as simply as possible, but not at the expense of clarity.

Unified:

All parts are clearly connected.

Focused and specific:

Can be adequately and convincingly argued within the paper, scope is not overly broad.

Significant:

Has importance to readers, answers the question “So what?”

Crafting a thesis

Research is usually vital to develop a strong thesis. Exploring sources can help you develop and refine your central point.

1. Conduct background research.

Background research will help you narrow your research focus and contextualize your argument in relation to other research.

2. Narrow the research topic.

Ask questions as you review sources:

- What themes and issues emerge from current writings on the topic?
- What aspect(s) of the topic interest you most?
- What questions or concerns does the topic raise for you?

Overly broad research topic: Climate change and carbon emissions

More focused topic: U.S. government policies on carbon emissions

3. Formulate and explore a relevant research question.

Before committing yourself to a single viewpoint, formulate a specific question to explore.

Example: What role does and should the U.S. government play in regulating carbon emissions?

4. Develop a working thesis.

A working thesis has a clear focus but is not yet fully formed. It is a good foundation for further developing a more refined argument.

Example: The U.S. government has the responsibility to help reduce carbon emissions through public policy and regulation.

This thesis has a clear focus but leaves some major questions unanswered. For example, why is regulation of carbon emissions important? Why should the government be held accountable for such regulation?

5. Test the working thesis.

Continue research on the more focused topic. Is the topic:

- broad enough to yield sufficient sources and supporting evidence?
- narrow enough for in-depth and focused research?
- original enough to offer a new and meaningful perspective that will interest readers?

6. Fine-tune the thesis.

Your thesis will probably evolve as you gather sources and ideas. If your research focus changes, you may need to re-evaluate your search strategy and to conduct additional research. This is usually a good sign of the careful thought you are putting into your work!

Example: Because climate change, which is exacerbated by high carbon emissions, adversely affects almost all citizens, the U.S. government has the responsibility to help reduce carbon emissions through public policy and regulation.