

DEVELOPING YOUR THESIS (Short Version)

Adapted from the Composition Center at Dartmouth College

A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT WILL MAKE A CLAIM

Develop an interesting perspective that you can support and defend. This perspective must be more than an observation. "America is violent" is an observation. "Americans are violent because they are fearful" (the position that Michael Moore takes in *Bowling for Columbine*) is an argument. Why? Because it posits a perspective. It makes a claim.

A good thesis will inspire (rather than quiet) other points of view. If your thesis is positing something that no one can (or would wish to) argue with, then it's not a very good thesis.

A GOOD THESIS STATEMENT WILL CONTROL THE ENTIRE ARGUMENT

Your thesis statement determines what you are required to say in a paper. It also determines what you cannot say. Every paragraph in your paper exists in order to support your thesis. Accordingly, if one of your paragraphs seems irrelevant to your thesis you have two choices: get rid of the paragraph, or rewrite your thesis.

Understand that you don't have a third option: you can't simply stick the idea in without preparing the reader for it in your thesis. The thesis is like a contract between you and your reader. If you introduce ideas that the reader isn't prepared for, you've violated that contract.

A GOOD THESIS WILL PROVIDE STRUCTURE FOR THE ARGUMENT

A good thesis not only signals to the reader *what* your argument is, but *how* your argument will be presented. In other words, your thesis statement should either directly or indirectly suggest the structure of your argument to your reader.