

# The Strong Thesis

Realize that a thesis is an assertion made by a writer, one that must be proven by the rest of the paper. An *assertion* is, by definition, a declaration or bold statement. Therefore, the thesis boldly declares something that must be supported, explained, and proven. A thesis is not an obvious truth or fact; such things do not need to be proven. In one sense, you might say that a thesis is the author's central opinion about some subject or issue, but it is stated without the use of a personal pronoun.

Keep in mind that a good thesis has three characteristics: it must be **restricted**, **unified**, and **precise**.

To be **restricted**, a thesis must limit the scope of an essay to what can be discussed in detail within the perimeters of the paper's expected length. For example, you would not have the following thesis for a four-page paper: **"The United States has a serious problem with gangs."** This thesis is too general in nature, something you would need to write a book (or at least a long research paper) to prove. A better thesis for a relatively short paper would be: **"In Chicago, gang activity has hindered the educational effectiveness of the public high schools."** Notice that the words *Chicago*, *educational effectiveness*, and *high schools* all serve to narrow the focus of the thesis and therefore make the paper more manageable to write. A good thesis is restricted in focus.

Also, a thesis must be **unified**; in other words, it must express only one idea. Consider what is wrong with this thesis: **"Gang-related murders have increased significantly in the past fifteen years, and new gang member initiates are younger each year, making the job of controlling gangs even more difficult for police."** The problem with this thesis is that it commits the writer to three different topics: 1) the increase of gang-related murders; 2) the initiation of younger gang members; and 3) the problem of gang control by police. When a thesis uses a coordinating sentence, containing two or more parts, it is important that all of the parts are closely related so that the focus of the paper is not diffused. For example, **"Chicago's mayor needs to work harder to curb gang violence by increasing the number of police patrols in gang-infiltrated neighborhoods, pressing the courts for stiffer sentences for gang offenders, and establishing an educational campaign to teach children how to resist gang involvement."** All of these coordinated parts of the sentence center around what the mayor of Chicago could and should do to solve the gang problem in the city.

Furthermore, a good thesis is **precise**, meaning that when it is read, it can only have one interpretation. Vague words should be avoided. And abstract words may be problematic, unless the paper is dealing with an abstract issue; for example a philosophy paper on "phenomenology" may require more abstract language than a history paper on Abraham Lincoln's *Emancipation Proclamation*. Generally, try to make the thesis as clear and specific as possible, fleeing from words that express nondescript meaning, such as *unusual*, *interesting*, *inspiring*, or *important*, to name a few. This thesis, **"Gang life, which resembles family life, is fascinating,"** would be better stated, **"Members of a gang generally interact in a manner that resembles a family, and the parallels between the two social groups are strikingly similar."** A thesis with precise language makes for a better argument, one which a reader is more apt to understand and acknowledge.

Finally, a thesis sentence is most often expressed in a single sentence; as there are many different ways to write a sentence, there are many different ways to write a thesis. The thesis sentence is generally found at the end of a well developed introductory paragraph. This is not a rule set in stone but usually works well because it helps the reader to make an easy transition into the body of the paper. Remember, while you do have some flexibility in the way you craft your thesis sentence, without a thesis that is **restricted**, **unified**, and **precise**, it is nearly impossible to have a good paper.

## Exercises

All the following theses have one characteristic that is lacking; it is either **restriction**, **unity**, or **precision**. Identify the missing characteristic in the space provided, and then rewrite the sentence, trying to provide for the missing characteristic.

1. Plant life in the Central American countries is endangered by deforestation, the crime rates in those countries is higher than it has ever been before, and over half of their populations are illiterate.

This thesis statement lacks \_\_\_\_\_.

A better sentence would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Second-hand cigarette smoke is physically harmful for everybody.

This thesis statement lacks \_\_\_\_\_.

A better sentence would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Garage sales, which people visit often, can be a lot of fun.

This thesis statement lacks \_\_\_\_\_.

A better sentence would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Many animals in the Arctic Ocean are close to the point of extinction.

This thesis statement lacks \_\_\_\_\_.

A better sentence would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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5. Computer sales are on the rise these days, and boys and girls are getting more involved with their new interactive programs, while parents are finding them as essential tools for working in the contemporary world.

This thesis statement lacks \_\_\_\_\_.

A better sentence would be: \_\_\_\_\_

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