

The Flexible Thesis: What Happens If My Thesis Changes As I Write My Paper?

Many people have had to change their original thesis statement to work with their final product. A thesis statement can be slightly tweaked, moderately modified, or completely rewritten to fit your paper. What do you do when your thesis changes?

- *Don't panic.* You've spent two days working on your paper when you realize your thesis doesn't support your final draft. Your thesis statement may have been "There are no circumstances where plastic surgery isn't a vain attempt to hold on to youth." Yet, you find in your research that women who undergo breast augmentation after cancer surgery have a better psychological adjustment to surviving their illness. By slightly tweaking your thesis to read "There are only a few circumstances where plastic surgery can be justified as a medical necessity," you've just saved your paper.
- *Support contradictory ideas.* Using the example above, you might decide that your paper straddles both sides of the fence. By moderately modifying your thesis to read "Plastic surgery can be both an important medical adjunct or a frivolous attempt to hold on to fading beauty," you can now explore your topic in a fuller scope and can now tie two opposing views into one concrete thesis. Just be certain that your ideas are fully developed and refer back to your newly modified thesis statement.
- *Allow yourself to grow.* If you find your research has led you to consider a completely opposing view, allow yourself to acknowledge that you have become better informed on your topic and have experienced attitudinal growth. By completely rewriting your thesis to read "Plastic surgery has developed a negative reputation that negates an individual's right to ownership of his or her own body," you can reflect your newfound ideas and provide support for opposing research.

Making a Thesis Statement



What Is a Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement is an explanation of the topic you have chosen for a paper. It is specific and outlines your intent to dig deeper in a subject and report information from your own unique point of view. A well-written thesis statement will inform your instructor of which side of an argument you stand and will give insight to how you plan on defending your stance.

Why Is a Thesis Statement Important?

A good thesis statement will help you form an intelligent reflection about the topic you've chosen to explore. Think of it as a guide to help keep your writing from wandering away from the expressed main point. It also saves you work, as it helps you to narrow research to a specific area of a broader topic.

How to Write a Thesis Statement

If your professor has assigned a research paper exploring some aspect of current events, how do you go about developing a thesis for your paper?

Step 1: *Selecting a topic.*

After watching the news, you decide to write about *politics*. Now it's time to develop the topic further by...

Step 2: *Narrowing the topic.*

What aspect of politics do you want to write about? Let's say you decide to write about how some people never vote. Your narrowed topic might be "*People don't understand the importance of voting.*"

Using step two, you have taken a very broad topic and narrowed it to a specific aspect you can better explore through research. Let's narrow it even more by...

Step 3: *Taking a stance on a narrowed topic.*

Ask yourself a few questions about the narrowed topic. Why do some people decide not to vote? Your stance might be that:

Some people decide not to vote because they do not fully realize their ability to help in choosing their leaders.

You've done it! You've taken a broad topic, narrowed it down, and then made your stance known on the subject. Congratulations, you have a thesis statement!

How to Recognize a Strong Thesis Statement

A strong thesis doesn't make a statement; it takes a stand.

● **Weak:** The thesis of my paper is that global warming is caused by pollution.

● **Strong:** Even though stricter emission standards have been ordered by the government, industrial pollutants continue to be a major cause of global warming.

A strong thesis isn't an observation; it is a claim.

● **Weak:** Some people are bad drivers.

● **Strong:** Multi-tasking while driving increases the number of fatal accidents on national roadways.

A strong thesis doesn't introduce multiple topics; it expresses one main point.

● **Weak:** Gas prices are so high people can't buy groceries, take their kids to the zoo, or even drive to work because they can't afford gas.

● **Strong:** Steadily rising gas prices are causing many minimum wage earners to have to work a second job to offset fuel costs.

How to Modify a Weak Thesis into a Strong One

The key to making a weak thesis into a strong thesis is to *be specific*. Avoid overgeneralizations like "war is bad"—most people will agree war isn't good. The point of a thesis statement is to outline a specific main idea that challenges the reader to think critically about your topic. If your thesis is too vague, you will find your paper has no real point to make. Don't turn off a reader.