

CRAFTING A THESIS STATEMENT

What is a thesis statement?

A thesis statement is the heart of a paper, so understanding what a thesis is and how to create one is essential for writing a solid paper. A thesis contains the central point your paper is attempting to prove; therefore, it needs to be specific, arguable, and placed within proper context.

What does a successful thesis statement do?

A successful thesis statement:

- Will be supported with evidence, whether from primary sources, secondary sources, or a mixture of both.
- Must have an appropriate scope— it is narrow enough that it can be argued throughout the entire essay and not too broad that it cannot be covered in the length of the essay.
- Is interesting and arguable (provides a “so what?”).
- Should reflect your interpretation of a text, idea, or topic.
- Creates an expectation for your readers.
- Will move beyond observation and into analysis (i.e., the “what” or “how” of the argument is connected to the “why”).

Steps toward crafting a thesis statement:

1. Choose a topic.

Before creating a thesis, you must first decide the topic of your paper. Sometimes your professor will provide a specific prompt or set of topics to choose from, while other times you will have freedom to choose from a wide range of topics.

Regardless, it's important to remember that **your topic is not your thesis!**

2. Decide on a brainstorming method.

Once you have decided upon a topic for your paper, you will want to do some initial brainstorming to determine what aspects of your topic you are most interested in and which directions you might want to begin looking for support. To start, you can do a freewrite, make a mind-map, or even a pros and cons list.

3. Begin doing some outside research.

If you are writing a paper that requires outside research to make your argument, it is helpful to do some preliminary searches in the [library databases](#) or through [Google Scholar](#). You may also want to do some quick searches for popular sources such as newspaper articles if your topic is related to current events.

4. Narrow your topic to fit the scope of the assignment.

Use your brainstorm and initial research dive to narrow your topic so that you will be able to fully answer the question or tackle the ideas within the scope of your paper's length and requirements. One way to begin narrowing your topic is to think about categories such as **population** (who is affected by my topic and how? Are different groups affected differently?), **location** (where do people affected by my topic live or where do events related to my topic take place?), or **time period**

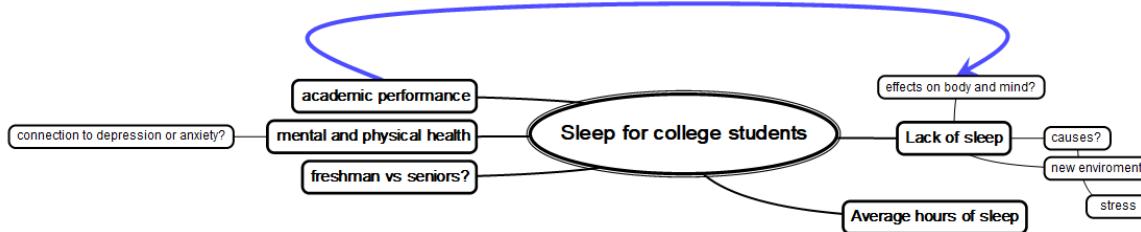
(how long has my topic been relevant? When did important events related to my topic take place?).

5. Develop a position or make an argument about your narrowed, researched topic.
 Your thesis needs to be arguable *and* specific, so you will want to make sure that your thesis statement displays a position or argument about your topic. Your argument should be based on the supporting evidence you have found in the research gathering phase. Remember that your thesis should be both **debatable**—meaning it can be reasonably argued against—and **defensible**—meaning you can use clear evidence to support your claims.
6. Include a counter-argument and/or a supporting statement.
 One way to ensure that you are crafting a thesis statement that is specific, argumentative, and evidence-based is to use a structure that either includes a counterclaim and some indication of what your main supporting points will be.

Example thesis:

For this example, let's say that our professor has told us to write a research paper in which you take a position about a topic that is of relevance and interest to college students. Since this is a broad prompt, you might begin by deciding you want to write on the **sleep patterns of college students**.

1. So now you have your topic, and maybe you've refined it a bit to be **lack of sleep among college students**. This topic is not our thesis, but rather our jumping off point for narrowing our topic, finding a research angle, and crafting an argument.
2. You then would move into the brainstorming phase, in which you would start to refine your topic and decide what aspect you want to focus on. After doing a hypothetical mind-mapping exercise, perhaps you decide to focus on **lack of sleep among college students**. More specifically, you decide to research some of the **main causes** of sleep deprivation as well as some of the **ways it affects** college students.



3. Now it's time to do some research. You might decide to do some quick searches for terms such as "sleep deprivation" and "college students," to see what you find, you might look at databases relating to psychology, and you might do some Google searches for any recent popular sources that tackle the issue. During this step, perhaps you notice multiple articles that mention issues that freshmen face with adjusting to new sleep and academic patterns, as well as sources that point out how lack of sleep results in decreased brain function. You decide that you want to focus on the **ways that sleep deprivation affects the mental health and academic progress of new college students**.
4. You can then continue to narrow your topic down until you have something within the scope of your research paper. You've already done some **population** narrowing to get to

freshmen, and you may want to do some **location and time** narrowing by limiting your focus to the US over the last decade.

5. It's time to begin crafting an argument around your narrowed topic, **how lack of sleep among college freshmen affects their mental health**. With this topic, your argument or position will likely be first asserting **how** sleep deprivation specifically impacts this student population, then arguing for a specific course of action. For this example, perhaps you decide to make the argument that **lack of sleep among college freshmen results in potential mental health issues which can in turn impact these students' overall adjustment to college academics, so colleges should prioritize services that promote wellness and sleep education**.
6. Finally, to ensure that your thesis is as specific and argumentative as possible, you will want to rephrase your thesis statement to position your research and invention and preview some of your central supporting points. So, you might wind up with something like this: **In order to combat difficulties adjusting to college life that stem from sleep deprivation in freshmen students, which include impacts to both mental health and academic success, universities should invest in services and programming that emphasizes sleep education and wellness**.