

## CREATING A THESIS STATEMENT

The thesis statement is the center around which the rest of your paper revolves; it is a clear, concise statement of the position you will defend.

| Components of a Strong Thesis  | Components of a Weak Thesis  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Argumentative, debatable</li> <li>● Specific</li> <li>● Original, goes beyond class discussion</li> <li>● Can be supported with textual evidence</li> <li>● Answers the prompt</li> <li>● Clearly and concisely stated</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Summarizes, states a fact</li> <li>● Broad, makes a generalization</li> <li>● Repeats class discussion or other critics</li> <li>● Unrelated to or contradicted by the text</li> <li>● Unrelated or partial response to prompt</li> <li>● Language is vague, wordy</li> </ul> |

### Getting Started

If you're just beginning to think about a thesis, it may be useful to ask yourself some of the following questions. This list is not exhaustive; anything that helps you consider your text or subject in a complex, unusual, or in-depth manner will get you on the right track:

- Do I have a gut response to the prompt? Does anything from my reading jump to mind as something that could help me argue one way or another?
- What is the significance of this text or subject? Why did my professor choose it? How does it fit into the broader themes or goals of the course?
- How does this text or subject relate to the broader context of the place or time period in which it was written or in which it occurred?
- Does this text or subject challenge or complicate my ideas about race, class, gender, or religion? About political, carceral, or educational institutions?
- Does anything in this text seem to not “fit in” with the rest of it? Why could that be?
- Are there aspects of the text (or two separate texts) which, when I compare and contrast them, can illuminate something about the text(s) that wasn't clear before?
- Does the author make any stylistic choices— perspective, word choice, pacing, setting, plot twists, poetic devices— that are crucial to our understanding of the text or subject?

### Developing Your Ideas

At this point you should have some potential ideas, but they don't have to be pretty yet. Your next goal will be to play with them until you arrive at a single argument that fulfills as many of the above “Components of a Strong Thesis” as possible. See the following examples of weak or unfinished thesis statements:

Setting is an important aspect of *Wuthering Heights*.

Britain was stable between 1688 and 1783.

The first example is argumentative, but it's not that argumentative—most critics agree that setting is important to *Wuthering Heights*. Both examples are too broad. One way to develop them is to consider potential conjunctions that would help you complicate your ideas:

| Conjunction   | Conjunction's Purpose   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Because, so, as</li> <li>• But, however, yet, although, despite</li> <li>• When, where</li> <li>• Unless, except</li> <li>• Before, once, until</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specifies your reasoning</li> <li>• Introduces nuance</li> <li>• Confines idea to specific time or place</li> <li>• Introduces an exception to your idea</li> <li>• Specifies order in which things occur</li> </ul> |

See below for examples of stronger or more complete thesis statements. In part due to the addition of conjunctions “because” and “as,” these are more argumentative, more specific, and more complex:

Because the moors in *Wuthering Heights* are a personification of Heathcliff's personality, their presence suggests that human emotion and the natural world are intricately entwined in the novel.

Corruption was a major source of stability in Britain between 1688 and 1783, as landed elites controlled every aspect of British government and ensured political stability at the cost of social equality.

### I have a thesis. Now what?

Once you feel confident about your final thesis statement, you have conquered the most important (and usually, the most difficult) part of writing a paper. Here are two ways your thesis can help you figure out what to do next to organize your introduction according to a clear, logical progression of ideas. When you complete one sentence, ask yourself what idea flows naturally out of it, or what your reader will want to know next.

|  | Wuthering Heights Examples  | British History Examples   |
|--|---|--|
| <i>Gathering evidence:</i> Look back at your text(s) and begin compiling a list of quotations or ideas that would support your thesis statement. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptions of the moors</li> <li>• Descriptions of Heathcliff, or moments when other characters talk about him</li> </ul>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instances of political corruption from 1688-1783 that led to stable government</li> <li>• Instances of social inequality from 1688-1783</li> </ul>                                  |
| <i>Considering structure:</i> See if your thesis statement gives you any clues about how to organize your thoughts into body paragraphs.         | The moors and Heathcliff can each have their own paragraph. Or separate paragraphs can tackle separate qualities, i.e. the wild nature of both, the morose nature of both, etc. | Political corruption and social inequality can each have their own paragraph. Or, if there are cause-and-effect relationships between specific instances of corruption and inequality, each pair can have its own paragraph. |

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Definition of thesis statement adapted from earlier Hamilton College Writing Center Resource “Introductions and Thesis Statements.”

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