

Introduction

Writing often takes the form of persuasion - convincing others that you have an interesting, logical point of view on a particular subject. Persuasion is a skill you practice regularly in your daily life: you persuade your siblings to help you clean the house, your parents to let you borrow the car, or your friend to watch your favorite movie, etc. Specific assignments often ask you to make a persuasive case in writing – that is, you are asked to convince your reader of your point of view. This form of persuasion follows a predictable pattern in writing: after a brief introduction of your topic, you state your point of view on the topic. This sentence is the **thesis** and it serves as the guiding point of the argument you'll make in the rest of your essay.

What Is A Thesis Statement?

A thesis statement:

tells the reader how you will interpret the significance of the subject matter under discussion.

is a road map for the essay; it tells the reader what to expect from the rest of the essay.

directly answers the question asked; a thesis is an *interpretation* of a subject, not the subject itself.

e.g.: the subject of an essay might be the Protestant Reformation; a thesis offers a specific interpretation of the Reformation

is a statement that someone could disagree with.

is a sentence somewhere in your introduction (first paragraph) that presents your argument to the reader.

How Do I Create A Thesis?

When creating your thesis, ask yourself the following:

Does my thesis actually answer the question as asked?

Re-reading the question after creating your thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.

Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?

If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it's possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.

Is my thesis statement broad enough?

Thesis statements that are too specific often do not have a strong argument because it is difficult to add supporting details. "Martin Luther criticized the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation" is a fact, not an argument. "Martin Luther was the most important figure to criticize the Catholic Church during the Protestant Reformation" is an argument you can prove.

Process Example

Suppose you are asked to write an essay to answer the following question:

"What is the best movie of all time?"

While developing the path of your essay in an outline, your basic thesis may be this:

“The best movie of all time is Forrest Gump.”

The question that this statement then begs is “*Why* is Forrest Gump the best movie of all time?” Ask yourself this same question in order to begin to clarify your arguments (perhaps you think, “Forrest Gump contains important themes” or “Forrest Gump contains many true-to-life events” or “Forrest Gump is a character that the viewer can truly love”). Now you have a basic thesis with three examples (a.k.a., three arguments in the standard 5-paragraph essay) on which to prove your overall argument – your thesis.

Now, push your interpretation further –*what* important themes does it contain? *What* true-to-life events are in Forrest Gump (and why is this important)? *In what ways* is Forrest Gump a character that the viewer can truly love (and, again, why is this important)?

As you plan your essay through your outline, you will begin to identify these reasons more precisely with specific information and details. Here’s what it might look like:

- I. Thesis: *“The best movie of all time is Forrest Gump.”*
- II. Forrest Gump contains important themes.
 - A. good triumphs over bad
 - B. love is victorious
- III. Forrest Gump contains many true-to-life events.
 - A. Nathan Bedford Forrest/KKK
 - B. desegregation of University of Alabama
- IV. Forrest Gump is a character that the viewer can truly love
 - A. physically disabled boy succeeds in life
 - B. mentally disabled boy is in many ways more intelligent than others

After completing your outline, look back at your original, basic thesis statement. Although it directly answers the question as asked and as such, is a complete and valid thesis statement, if this was the only sentence in your introduction the reader would think, “But, *why* is it the best?” A **thoroughly developed thesis** not only mentions your main reasons and some of the specific details that will be in your essay, it requires additional lead-in information about the general subject matter to draw the reader in to *wanting* to read your essay.

Here is an example based on the information in the above outline:

“20th Century America was a difficult time and place for an individual to be disabled. Stereotypes and discrimination were abundant throughout the nation at this time, but were predominantly present in the deep southern state of Alabama. The movie Forrest Gump, set in just this type of environment, is truly the best movie of all time. Forrest, a physically and mentally disabled child born into this culture of racism and violence, proves that good can conquer evil and that love will in fact conquer all. This film entices the viewer’s interest with many true-to-life events such as the role of Nathan Bedford Forrest in the founding of the KKK and the controversial desegregation of the University of Alabama while making them realize that Forrest is in many ways more intelligent than others around him. In the end, the viewer will fall in love with the main character, who, despite his physical and mental shortcomings, truly succeeds in life.”

Compare this full introduction to the original basic thesis. This introductory paragraph presents a way of interpreting evidence that illuminates the significance of the question. Keep in mind that this is one of *many* possible answers to this question - it is not the one and only right answer to the question. There isn’t one right answer; there are only strong and weak thesis statements and strong and weak uses of evidence.

Now write a basic thesis statement to the following prompt (one that simply restates the question):

What was the most important cause of the Protestant Reformation?

Basic thesis statement:

Now write an outline for this basic thesis statement:

Argument #1: _____

Evidence #1: _____

Evidence #2: _____

Argument #2: _____

Evidence #1: _____

Evidence #2: _____

Argument #3: _____

Evidence #1: _____

Evidence #2: _____

Now write your introductory paragraph to include a thoroughly developed thesis:
