

YORKWAC Infobase

Developing a Thesis Statement

Most academic papers need to have a *thesis*. Here are the basics of what a thesis is and how you develop a thesis statement.

1. What's a thesis?

The word *thesis* comes from ancient Greek and literally mean “something you put,” as in, “Let me put it to you this way.” A thesis is *the main idea that you are putting forward in your paper*.

The sentence in which you state your thesis is called your *thesis statement*. The thesis statement usually comes towards the end of your introductory paragraph.

2. What makes a good thesis?

A good thesis is *controversial*. That doesn't mean it has to be extreme; a controversial statement is simply a statement with which somebody could agree or disagree.

Consider the following example:

No presidential candidate has won the White House without winning the Ohio primary since Richard Nixon did it in 1968.

The statement above is true. It's a simple fact of electoral history. There's nothing to agree with or disagree with. Therefore, this statement would **not** make a good thesis for a research paper.

However, consider the statement below:

In today's electoral climate, no presidential candidate can win the White House without winning the Ohio primary.

Maybe it's true; maybe it's not. In other words, it's a matter of opinion. It's controversial—something you could agree with or disagree with. Therefore, this statement would make an **excellent** thesis for a research paper.

The **YORKWAC Infobase** includes many other Infosheets that can help you with your writing assignment.

If you want more information on how to work with thesis statements, you might want to try Infosheet #12, Arguing Your Thesis.