

WRITING A THESIS

THINGS TO REMEMBER



ANALYZE

Look for tension, interest, ambiguity, controversy, and/or complication. Expand upon the author's intentions to help develop a working thesis.

WRITE IT

What is more frustrating than thinking of a great thesis, and then forgetting it? Writing it down will force you to think logically and concisely to help construct a final thesis.

COUNTERARGUE

Once a working thesis is developed, think of what might be said against it. This helps refine your thesis, helping to refute any counterarguments later in your essay.

DEVELOPING A THESIS

Jury member

Readers of academic essays are like jury members; before they have read too far, they want to know what the essay argues as well as how the writer plans to make the argument. The reader should think: "This essay is going to try to convince me of something. I'm not convinced yet but i'm interested to see how I might be."

What it isn't

An effective thesis can't be answered by a "yes" or "no." A thesis is not a topic; nor a fact; nor an opinion.

Two Parts

A good thesis has two parts. It should tell what you plan to argue, and it should "telegraph" how you plan to argue- that is, what particular support for your claim is going where in your essay.

SOME CAVEATS

SOME NEGATIVE EXAMPLES



A THESIS IS NEVER A QUESTION

Readers of academic essays expect to have questions discussed, explored, or even answered.



EXAMPLE

A question ("Why did communism collapse in Eastern Europe?") is not an argument, and without an argument, a thesis is dead in the water.

A THESIS IS NEVER A LIST

"For political, economic, social and cultural reasons, communism collapsed in eastern europe"



IT TELEGRAPHS...

However, this sentence lacks tension and doesn't advance an argument. Everyone knows that politics, economics, and culture are important.



THIS IS AN INEFFECTIVE THESIS

It is likely to mark you as moralistic and judgmental rather than rational and thorough. It may spark a defensive reaction from the audience and unmotivated readers to read on.

A THESIS SHOULD NEVER BE VAGUE, COMBATIVE, OR CONFRONTATIONAL

"Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe because communism is evil."

SOME CAVEATS

SOME POSITIVE EXAMPLES



A THESIS HAS A DEFINABLE, ARGUABLE CLAIM

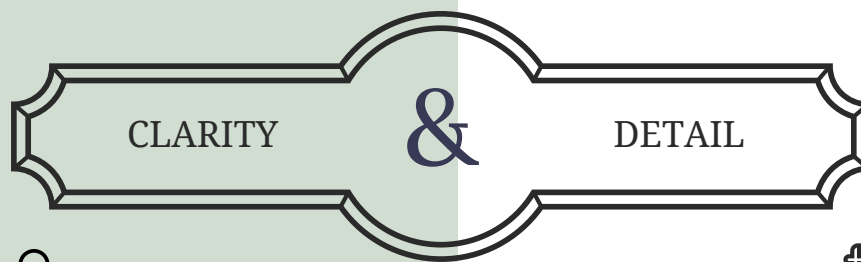
EXAMPLE

"While cultural forces contributed to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of economies played the key role in driving its decline"

This is an effective thesis that "telegraphs", so that the reader expects the essay to have a section about cultural forces and another about the disintegration of economies.

This thesis makes a definite, arguable claim: that the disintegration of economies played a more important role than cultural forces in defeating communism in Eastern Europe.

The reader would react to this statement by thinking, "Perhaps what the author says is true, but I am not convinced. I want to read further to see how the author argues this claim."



AVOID OVERUSED, GENERAL TERMS AND ABSTRACTIONS.

"Communism collapsed in Eastern Europe because of the ruling elite's inability to address the economic concerns of the people"



A THESIS SHOULD BE AS CLEAR AND SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE

"Communism collapsed due to societal discontent."