

## Crafting a good thesis statement

1. A good topic is **narrow enough to require you to dig deep**; a good thesis statement shows you have dug deep and developed an attitude or a passion about the topic.
2. A good thesis statement is a **complete sentence**. You may start with two well-articulated sentences, which means the relationship between the ideas in the two sentences is made clear, but when you have done so you should be able to work them into one complex sentence.
3. A good thesis statement **asserts something**, declares a debatable claim. It doesn't just state facts, but introduces purpose or passion that you think the facts justify. Whether you have researched a question your teacher asked, or a question you yourself asked, the thesis statement answers it directly, clearly, and unambiguously.  
☛ **Don't re-ask the question!** Avoid "question words" (*who, what, why, how, whether*) and their disguised forms (*the way, if, for what reason*). Example: Don't answer the question, "Who is the protagonist?" with "The conflict resolution reveals who the protagonist is." Instead, say "Igor's final decision resolves the conflict and reveals him as the protagonist."
4. A good thesis statement appears in the introduction and **predicts the scope of your discussion**. The reader should see a list of arguments you will use to support your claim. It is almost a brief outline of the whole essay.

## Examples and non-examples

A good topic is specific enough that it invites a more focused thesis statement.

- Poor topic: War
- Poor thesis: "Wars have occurred in every culture in every era of history."  
(Not even debatable.)
- Better topic: Modern war and the Just War Doctrine
- So-so thesis: "People who support war these days need to learn about the Just War Doctrine."  
(Debatable – and worth debating!)

The best thesis statements not only assert a debatable claim, but also predict the scope – the supporting ideas that the discussion will cover.

- So-so thesis: "War is a failure of diplomacy."  
(Debatable, but doesn't predict the scope.)
- Good thesis: "If we consider the principles of the Just War Doctrine, and compare those against the justifications of the wars waged in the twentieth century, we must conclude that diplomats have not been allowed a proper opportunity to prevent needless wars."  
(Debatable, and it suggests a scope that would answer: *What is the Just War Doctrine? Did the JWD justify WWI? WWII? Korea? Vietnam? ...and so on.*)
- So-so thesis: "Diplomacy cannot solve some modern world conflicts; only war can."  
(Debatable, but doesn't predict the scope.)
- Good thesis: "The Just War Doctrine has proven inadequate to solve modern world conflicts because of the combined effects of modern military technology and guerilla terrorists whose membership crosses political borders."  
(Debatable, and it suggests a scope that would answer: *What is the Just War Doctrine? How has modern military technology made the JWD harder to apply? How have terrorists not associated with one government made it harder to apply the JWD?*)