

UNIVERSITY WRITING PROGRAM

FEATURES OF A SUCCESSFUL THESIS

1. **A thesis must consist of a claim.** Questions are not claims; nor are simple descriptions. A thesis is not a topic or theme, either. It is a *contention*—something to be argued.
2. **A thesis should not be obviously true or false.** If a claim is obviously true, there is no need to argue for it; and if it is obviously false, there is no reason to argue for it, either. Rather, the claim should be plausible, but in need of *argument* and *evidence* to establish its veracity.
3. **A thesis should not be overly abstract or general.** It must be *specific* enough to be arguable, that is, specific enough to support with the evidence available to you.
4. **A thesis should be original.** It should not merely recapitulate another writer's argument. However, this does not mean that a thesis cannot be based on or influenced by the arguments of other writers.
5. **A thesis should be arguable.** To be arguable:
 - a. There must be *evidence* available to support the claim made in the thesis.
 - b. The claim must be of an appropriate *scope* such that it can be adequately argued within the length of the paper.
6. **A thesis should be clear.** Remove as much ambiguity as possible from your thesis statement, and define any technical or ambiguous terms (e.g., “Durkheim-Boas tradition,” “reductionism”) that appear in your thesis or essay.
7. **A thesis should be concise.** Generally, a thesis will be contained within a single sentence, although sometimes more complex theses are developed over two or three sentences.
8. **A thesis should be obvious to your reader.** Often, a thesis statement begins with a phrase like “I will argue...,” “In this essay I will contend...,” etc. Theses are often stated in the first paragraph or in introductory paragraphs.

Credit: University Writing Program Brandeis University

The Brandeis University Writing Program, including the Writing Center, First-Year Writing, and Writing in the Majors, offers support for writing throughout the community, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and staff.

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