

Writing a thesis that is appropriately complex while still being interesting and supportable can be a challenge. Asking yourself these five questions can help you to troubleshoot your thesis before you get too far into your paper.

**Does your thesis statement fit the SCOPE of your paper?** It's tempting to start "Since the dawn of time," but the history of everything everywhere is a bit outside the scope of a 2-(or even a 200-page) paper. **Think about limiting your scope** to something more manageable. Try: "In the first paragraph..." or "In the second half of Martin Luther's 'I Have a Dream' speech..." or "In the conversation between Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy the first night that Jane is sick..."

**How ARGUABLE is your thesis statement?** A good thesis statement is the peg on which your entire paper hangs. **If your sentence is not arguable, you will not be able to make a solid claim** and your research (evidence) will not effectively convince the reader of the strength of your argument. This sentence is not very arguable: "Dogs and cats are common pets." It's based on a broad truth that's so universal it's not much of an argument—everyone agrees it's true (and a little boring). This would be better: "Though small dogs and cats might seem to make more sense for apartment dwellers, large dogs are actually great pets for people living in tight spaces." Then you have to spend time convincing your reader that your counterintuitive argument is correct—with research and clearly organized writing.

**Is your thesis statement SPECIFIC?** Limiting the scope of your paper to a manageable size is the first step; the next is having a specific thesis statement that makes a unique argument keeps you from getting caught up in big, vague ideas. Sometimes it seems like a big idea is a better argument since you can say almost anything, but it can like the Bog of Eternal Stench from *The Labyrinth*: you get really stuck and when you do, your paper stinks. **Better to be specific about what you're trying to say rather than throwing everything and the kitchen sink into your paper.** Do that work first with your thesis sentence.

**Does your thesis statement make SENSE both as a sentence and for your paper?** This might seem obvious, but your thesis statement needs to be a sentence that is easily understood—by you and the reader—so don't use words you don't know and write clearly. It also needs to reflect what happens in your paper. Sometimes you come up with a thesis and then, when you've written your paper, you realize it needs to be adjusted. Write it during your pre-writing or outlining stage, go back and check on it while you're writing your paper, then revise it again at the end. **Make sure your thesis reflects what your paper is actually about.** Read it out loud to yourself or to a friend to make sure it makes grammatical sense or that it sounds polished.

**Is your thesis statement INTERESTING?** On the surface, this might seem like the most subjective of these tips, but it's important to have an interesting idea from which you write your paper. If you're bored, chances are your reader will be as well. **Find an argument that says something new**—either with new research or with a new approach. Even if you're talking about something that there's been scholarly debate about for years, you might be just the bright young scholar who comes up with a new argument about the Wife of Bath's teeth that changes the scope of the discussion. Or at least gives you enough to say for a short paper.

**Source:**

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