

DEVELOPING A THESIS

These are some tips to help you develop a thesis for your paper.

1. Identify your topic

For example, your topic might be “gun control.” The topic makes no argument about anything. It is usually a noun or a noun phrase.

2. Make an observation to develop a thesis

A topic is not a thesis. You must make an observation about your topic to create a thesis. That observation needs to be unique—something another person might disagree with. It must also be specific. For example, the statement “Gun control is a problem in this country” is too bland to be a good thesis. To develop your thesis, ask yourself what interests you about this topic. How do you feel about the topic? What are the most important aspects? What can you argue about the topic?

You might observe that there are many stories in today’s media about children and guns. This observation is more unique than “Gun control is a problem in this country,” but it is still too general and not arguable. Another observation is necessary. You might notice that many accidental deaths involving children playing with guns have occurred or that due to the easy access to guns, violence in schools has increased.

3. Incorporate a verb into the thesis

A verb reflecting an argumentative stance turns a topic into a thesis. For example, this is a thesis about making guns inaccessible to children: “Because of the recent rash of violence in the schools, parents should be held responsible and jailed if their children commit crimes with their guns.” When you have developed a thesis, test it by asking the following questions.

Is this thesis defensible?

Can it be supported?

Does the thesis clearly state my point of view for the reader?

Your thesis should say something interesting, informative, and new to the reader. Writing that states the obvious is not very useful.

Develop an argument based on your thesis

Now you are ready to develop the thesis in your draft. Be sure to show your reader why the thesis is important. For example, if you find the issue of children and guns to be interesting, you might decide to develop a thesis arguing that laws should be passed making guns inaccessible to children in their homes. Consider these questions:

- Why does the observation matter?
- What larger issues does this observation give us insight into?
- What can I demonstrate about my observation that a reader might disagree with?

Revise your thesis after you have started writing, if necessary

As you write your paper, you may discover new ideas that lead you to rethink your thesis. It is important to revise your thesis according to these new ideas.

Ideas for this handout were contributed by Dr. Kellie Dawson