



Developing a Working Thesis



The thesis is the foundation of all research papers. The thesis establishes a paper's content, the argument or analysis being made, and serves to outline the progression of discussion and support. Most beginning writers find it difficult to formulate a topic and supporting details into a final thesis statement to begin a paper. However, instead of trying to have your thesis “set in stone” from the beginning, start with a thesis that is friendlier to adjustments as you consider the ideas you will write about and what support you will use: a *working* thesis.

1. What is a Working Thesis?

- A. A working thesis is similar to a final thesis: It is a statement that asserts one specific topic of argument or analysis as a focus and sets the tone or position you are taking on that topic. A working thesis also states the broad details of support you are using to justify your position. These details appear in the same order in your thesis statement as they will arise in the body of your paper.

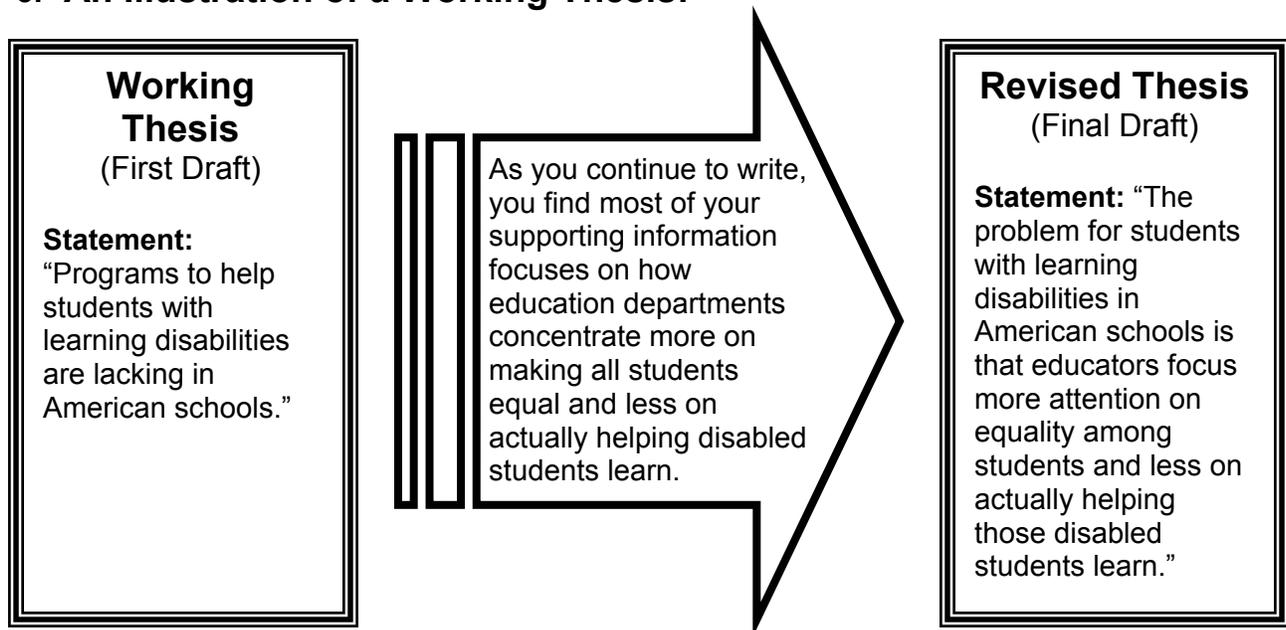
- B. A working thesis is *different* from a final thesis in that it is meant to evolve throughout the course of your writing. The defining characteristic of a working thesis is that it is **flexible**. What makes it a “working” thesis is that it is subject to change as your ideas develop.

2. How is a Working Thesis Helpful in Revising for the Final Draft?

- A. After you have selected which evidence to use in support of your argument or analysis and you have drafted your paper, you may return to your working thesis and find it does not properly fit the actual topic and details in your paper. In this case you should revise it to state exactly what the main focus and supporting ideas in the paper are.

- B.** Remember when revising that each paragraph in your paper serves to support your thesis. If any information in your supporting paragraphs is irrelevant to your thesis, you need to either omit that paragraph or adjust your thesis to incorporate it. You cannot, however, just include the idea in your paper without preparing your reader for it within the thesis sentence.
- C.** After writing your first draft, decide if your working thesis needs revision by asking yourself these guideline questions:
- Does my thesis sentence clearly state my argument or analysis?
 - Are my supporting points emphasized?
 - Does it present the structure of my paper?
- D.** At the end of revisions, when you feel you have experimented enough with your working thesis to clearly and strongly state your topic of discussion and support, picture yourself as another reader and ask: “Does this thesis statement explain to me exactly what the paper’s topic, argument or analysis, and supporting points are?” If you find it does, you have a solid thesis.

3. An Illustration of a Working Thesis:



Information adapted from:
 Brunsvold, Libby. "Thesis Statement." LEO: Literacy Education Online. 14 Oct. 2003. St. Cloud State University. 5 Mar. 2004. <<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/thesistatement.html>>.
 Gocsik, Karen. "Developing Your Thesis." Dartmouth College Composition Center. 1997. Trustees of Dartmouth College. 5 Mar. 2004. <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/student/ac_paper/develop.html>.