

# Writing a Strong Thesis Statement

The thesis statement is the most important part of any argumentative writing. The purpose of a thesis statement is to convey your argument to your reader in a miniature form, like a road map of a larger journey. But what goes into writing a strong and effective thesis statement?

A strong thesis statement is **clear, specific, and debatable**.

## CLEAR

- Tells the reader what your one main argument or claim is without too many “fluff” words and tangents getting in the way. Tip: try to write your thesis the first time without using too many adverbs like “extremely”, “obviously”, and “clearly” - words that don’t add to your argument.
- Is easy for the reader to pick out - the reader should be able to look at your introductory paragraph and accurately highlight or underline your thesis.
- Should not take up the entire introductory paragraph.
- One way to organize your thesis statement (common at UO) is following the **enthymeme** format. The enthymeme develops a clear connection between a single claim (X) and the single best reason behind it (Y), using a statement of this type: “X because Y”

## SPECIFIC

- Addresses specific points that you will use to support your main claim, and includes the specific texts, theories, themes, time periods, etc. that are essential to your argument.
- Answers the specific question(s) asked by the prompt, without going on a tangent.
- Avoids hyperbolic or motivational-poster statements (“since the dawn of time” “all of history”) and vague phrases (“some scholars” “some other research”).
- Avoids being too broad (“Violence is harmful to society.”)

## DEBATABLE

- Does not have an obvious yes or no answer. Someone should be able to make a reasonable counterargument to your claim.
- Presents an argument, not a list of facts or a statement of fact.
- Avoids arguing from subjectivity, that is, avoids making it sound like you’re using your beliefs or feelings in place of evidence.
- Analyzes evidence, rather than simply telling a narrative or describing plot/characters.

Check out some examples of strong vs. weak thesis statements on the next page!

# Weak vs. Strong Thesis Statements

## Weak

## Stronger

<p>In this paper, I explore the theme of revenge in the tragedy <i>Agamemnon</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not specific or debatable</li> <li>- "Exploring a theme" is not "making a claim"</li> <li>- Does not give reader a clear roadmap</li> </ul>	<p>The <i>Agamemnon</i> ultimately shows that, even when characters like Clytemnestra have legitimate reasons to want revenge, revenge is a vicious cycle that fails to achieve true justice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Makes a more focused, debatable claim about the role of revenge in the play, mentioning a specific character</li> </ul>
<p>Public transit is beneficial for society.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vague: and broad society where? Beneficial how?</li> <li>- Not a debatable claim (most people would agree that public transit is beneficial)</li> </ul>	<p>Public transit is necessary for 21st-century urban life because it helps reduce the access gap between those who can afford cars and those who cannot.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Is specific about what kind of society</li> <li>- Links claim and reasoning clearly using enthymeme "X because Y" format</li> </ul>
<p>As research shows, many youth who are incarcerated for minor crimes later become reoffenders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Simply stating a fact that research has already shown, not making an argument</li> </ul>	<p>Instead of incarcerating youth for minor crimes, providing community support and addressing risk factors will help rehabilitate juvenile offenders more successfully.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Makes a clear policy recommendation that could be debated</li> </ul>
<p>The amount of children who eat junk food in today's society is simply disastrous.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Vague use of "today's society"</li> <li>- Melodramatic and subjective language ("simply disastrous")</li> <li>- Statement of personal opinion, not a claim</li> </ul>	<p>The lack of healthy food options available to low-income children is the result of structural inequality, not poorer morals among parents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Makes a clear claim about the reasons behind junk food consumption; offers a point someone could argue against (this is the problem, not that)</li> </ul>
<p>There are both negative and positive aspects to the use of technology in the classroom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Sits on the fence, trying to argue both sides of an argument</li> </ul>	<p>Although critics argue that technology distracts students, when teachers fully incorporate technology into their lesson plans, the benefits far outweigh the negatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Firmly takes a stance on the usefulness of technology, acknowledges negatives but establishes own claim in relation to them</li> </ul>