



Thesis Development: Myths and Facts

MYTH: The thesis is your opinion.

FACT: An opinion is your personal feeling about a topic. Another person may share your opinion, or not (*I like cats! Dogs are better!*), but they cannot argue against what you feel. By contrast, a thesis is a claim that is grounded in research and analysis. A claim can be proven or disproven, and it can have a real impact on the world.

MYTH: You need to know your main argument before you begin.

FACT: Your thesis is likely to change as you research your topic, and may change further as you write the paper. For example, you may realize that one of your working assumptions was incorrect, or discover that you're more interested in one part of your topic than another. Even though a thesis statement comes near the beginning of your paper, it represents the end of your thought process.

MYTH: You have to show “both sides” of the issue.

FACT: A thesis should be debatable, but that doesn't mean you will always be arguing against a particular person or position. In academic writing, we usually try to incorporate a variety of perspectives, but we recognize that not all claims are equally valid. You do not have to respond to views that are hateful, illogical, or factually incorrect.

EXAMPLE: In order to reduce poverty in BC, affordable housing should be the government's top priority.

This claim is debatable because there are other ways to address poverty (education, raising the minimum wage, and so on), any of which could be selected as the government's top priority. But I have not wasted the reader's time by inventing an opponent who thinks poverty is good.

Another way to make your claim debatable is to present a new approach to a problem, or to draw different kinds of researchers into a conversation within the space of your paper. Returning to the example above, what do economists say about reducing poverty? What about nurses? Historians? By examining the way experts in different fields address the same problem, you are more likely to make an original contribution.

MYTH: Your argument needs three supporting points.

FACT: You need to support your argument, but there is no fixed number of points or paragraphs you must use to do so. If your instructor insists on three supporting points, follow his or her instructions. Otherwise, choose the organizational structure that allows you to present your evidence as clearly as possible.