

*A thesis tells your reader  
what you will argue in  
your paper.*

*Your argument is  
based on:*

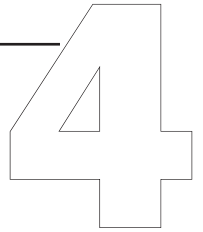
- Evidence you have gathered
- Research that points to a particular conclusion

*Your success is a result of:*

- Having a clear, forceful and supportable argument
- The ability to persuade your reader of the validity of that argument

## STEP FOUR

## identify your thesis



Your thesis is the key element upon which your essay or term paper is grounded. Without a solid, supportable thesis, the reader will question the work's validity.

So, *what is a thesis?*

**DEFINITION**

A thesis is a guide for your reader. It tells your reader what you will argue in your paper. This argument is based on:

- Evidence you have gathered
- Research that points to a particular conclusion

Success is a result of:

1. Having a clear, forceful and supportable argument
2. Being able to persuade your reader of the validity of that argument.

The question to ask yourself, is therefore “Do I have a sound argument, backed by solid research and supported by evidence, that I can present to my reader?”

Let me give you a couple of examples. The first is from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. One of the critical debates has always revolved around Hamlet's sanity. Here's the thesis:

*While Hamlet is tragically indecisive, my analysis shows that he is sane. In my essay, I will explore Hamlet's initial encounter with his father's ghost, and his mistreatment of Ophelia. I will argue, based on my interpretation of these examples, that there is adequate evidence in the text to prove my claim that Hamlet is sane.*

The case must be argued on the basis of the evidence in the text – not on your feelings about, in this case, the play. The reader asks, “Show me the evidence to support your argument.”

The second example comes from a more modern context. With the mapping of the human genome, companies have applied for thousands of gene patents. My thesis

*Keep your thesis statement handy – where you can see it or find it – so you always remember your focus*

*If you are unable to prove your thesis, revise it, or reconsider it*

is that *patenting genes severely restricts basic research by universities and other public research institutions*. I will argue that complex patent and licensing arrangements, now in place, prevent desirable research from being undertaken today and in the future.

My job is now to persuade you that a strong case exists for not accepting patents on genes.

### *Tips*

We suggest that in your drafts (not your final copy) you keep emphasizing and reminding yourself of your thesis by underlining it in your introduction. If you cannot identify your thesis clearly, it is doubtful whether your reader will be able to do so either.

As well, consider writing your thesis in big letters and putting it where you can see it. Take a copy in your binder when you're researching or writing, so you remember to stay on track.

### *Staying focused*

Return to the thesis after writing each section to ensure that you are still on track. And, continue to argue your main point rather than drifting off on some tangent.

Keep asking yourself as you do additional research, "Is what I'm doing useful to my thesis?" If it isn't, either drop that point, or check to see if the thesis itself is valid.

### *Can you revise your thesis?*

You do not have to stick to a thesis that cannot be proven. What if you find that as you go through various drafts, the evidence doesn't materialize, or draws you to a different conclusion? If this is the case, revise your thesis or reconsider it.

### *Summary*

Your argument needs to be based on solid, factual support. Your empirical evidence can be a text, a report, a study, an article – but keep in mind that this evidence must persuade the reader to accept the validity of your position.