

# The Thesis: Some Guidelines

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- 1. What a thesis should do
- 2. How to craft a thesis
- 3. How to test your thesis

# 1. What a thesis should do

# 1. A good thesis

- A. Articulates the main idea of the essay, answering the question asked of you.

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- Makes a claim that others might challenge.

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The first states a fact that no one would argue with.

The second makes a specific (if far-fetched) argument.

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Poor: **This essay will argue that** at least twenty-five percent of the federal budget should be spent on limiting pollution.

Rather than saying, “This essay will argue that twenty-five percent should be spent,” cut out the fat:

“Twenty-five percent should be spent”

Then my response might be not “Why does your essay argue that?” but “Why is that so?”

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## 2. How to craft a Thesis

We'll look at two approaches.

First, let's walk a sample thesis through the

**“How/Why” Approach:**

Start with a draft thesis, and ask How? and Why?

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**Because the long-term costs of pollution pose a significant burden to the federal government,** at least twenty-five percent of its budget should be spent on limiting pollution, **by subsidizing alternative energy research and building a national system of high-speed rail.** **(Addresses How and Why, and is therefore more specific)**

The 2nd approach to making your thesis more focused and specific:

## The 5-Step Approach

1. Broad Topic: **Start with a general subject** or idea to explore.
2. Narrowed Topic: **Focus** your angle; **zoom in** on one aspect of the subject.
3. Opinion/Interpretation: **Make an original argument** about the topic.
4. Reason: **Answer “why”** this argument is so.
5. Points: **Name key effects or instances** of your analysis that you will explore in more detail in the essay.

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We'll take a sample thesis through it....



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- I. Introduction
- II. **Disturbances to human habitats**
  - i. Example/support
  - ii. Example/support
- III. **Disturbances to water supplies**
  - i. Example/support
  - ii. Example/support
- IV. **Disturbances to arable land**
  - i. Example/support
  - ii. Example/support
- V. Conclusion

The body corresponds with the points and sequence of the thesis.

Let's look at another example  
using the **5-Step Approach**:

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Federal efforts to mitigate climate change should focus on a carbon tax rather than cap-and-trade policy, because it provides greater benefits to the taxpayer by its **predictability, transparency, and simplicity.**

Since this thesis sets up both a **comparison** (of carbon tax vs. cap-and-trade) and three **points of comparison**, we have a good sense of the essay's structure:

# I. Predictability

- A. Cap-and-trade policy
- B. Carbon tax

# II. Transparency

- A. Cap-and-trade policy
- B. Carbon Tax

# III. Simplicity

- A. Cap-and-trade policy
- B. Carbon Tax

The body corresponds with the points and sequence of the thesis.

# 3. How to test your thesis

# Ask:

- Have I fully answered the question?
- Have I stated a position that others might challenge or oppose?
- Is it specific enough?
- Do its points accurately suggest the shape and content of the essay?
- Does it pass the “How and Why” and/or the 5-Step tests?
- Does it answer “So what?” – that is, does it give a sense of why this argument matters?

**As you work on your essay, keep in mind:**

- Honing a thesis and writing an essay are **recursive** processes – **reassessing and revising are part of the job.**
- **It would be hard to create a perfect thesis without first writing any of the essay.** Writing itself helps us know what we want to say. We can't craft a thesis until we know what we want to say.
- **It's normal (and good!) for your thesis to change** as you write the essay, and/or for your essay to change as you hone the thesis.

# Unsure about your thesis?

Bring your essay to the  
Learning Assistance Center!

Megan Grumbling: [mgrumbling@une.edu](mailto:mgrumbling@une.edu)

John Daugherty: [jdaugherty@une.edu](mailto:jdaugherty@une.edu)