

## Developing a Working Thesis

A working thesis is a thesis statement that you adopt tentatively during your writing process as a means of guiding your research, reading and writing. You are likely to modify your working thesis statement based on insights and information gained in the writing process. As you develop the essay, the working thesis statement evolves into the definitive thesis statement of the final draft.

Developing a working thesis can serve to tell you what further information you need to provide in the essay and help you decide on the order of your ideas, or what further arguments you need to support the working thesis.

One way to generate a working thesis is to complete the following sentence in relation to the question you hope your essay will answer:

At this point I think I am going to argue **that** ....

Your working thesis should state your position on your topic and not simply present a topic.

Notice that completing the sentence, “I think I’m going to argue **whether** ...” will only result in a statement of your topic and not your position (“I think I’m going to argue **whether** or not Othello is responsible for his own fate,” for example, or “I think I’m going to argue **whether** or not judges’ discretion should be limited by legislating mandatory sentences for particular crimes”).

By contrast, a working thesis would state the position you plan to take on your topic: “At this point I’m going to argue **that** although Iago is clearly the catalyst, Othello himself is at least partially responsible for his own tragedy.” Or, “At this point I’m going to argue **that** judges must have the ability to take individual factors into account in determining an appropriate sentence and, thus, that mandatory sentences should not be legislated.”

Remember, your thesis statement, appearing in the introduction of your essay, prepares your reader for the arguments and information that will follow in the essay. It typically provides a succinct response to the question you wish to answer with the essay.

For more ideas on how to generate a working thesis see Creating a Working Thesis in the Choosing a Topic module. The same module also has helpful suggestions on generating ideas that can be applied at any point in the writing process.