



A thesis statement is the contract you make with your reader; it is what you *promise* your paper will address. A thesis statement provides the reader with a guide to your argument.

Writing a good thesis statement is HARD, people, it is hard. These are the four elements that I believe are essential to a decent thesis statement:

1. A good thesis statement identifies the type of paper you are writing: analytical or argumentative.
2. A good thesis statement will be focused on a topic which reasonable people would consider worthy of dialogue (it justifies discussion).
3. A good thesis statement will express one idea.
4. A good thesis statement will not be vague or ambiguous, but is specific to the assignment.

Not all thesis statements are created equal (or, all thesis statements are equal, but some are more equal than others). Consider the following guidelines when evaluating a thesis statement:

1. **A good thesis statement identifies the type of paper you are writing.**
 - a. This is argumentative: The *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* should be read as an editorial of subversion against collectively treasured Roman values of honor and purity.
 - b. This is analytical: An analysis of select passages from the *Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas* will identify three ways in which the editor of the text may have been attempting to subvert Roman social values of honor and purity at the same time he was contributing to the construction of early Christian martyr identity.
2. **A good thesis statement is worthy of dialogue.**
 - a. This does not justify discussion: distinctions exist between anorexia nervosa and anorexia mirabilis.
 - b. This justifies discussion: Analysis of select passages from *The Life of Saint Catherine* that highlight X in comparison with the case study as put forth by *Dying to Be Thin* writer/producer Larkin McPhee will demonstrate the distinction between anorexia nervosa and anorexia mirabilis.
3. **A good thesis statement expresses one idea.**
 - a. This does not express one idea: The *Letter of Petilian* highlights how social status contributed to the Donatist controversy, and scholars note that this is different from the previous focus on theology.
 - b. This expresses one idea: Analysis of the *Letter of Petilian* reveals that the previous scholarly focus on theology ignored how social status contributed to the Donatist controversy.
4. **A good thesis statement is not vague or ambiguous.**
 - a. This is ambiguous: There are many causes of the Christological controversy.
 - b. This is not ambiguous: Cyril of Alexandria's *Letters to the Egyptian Monks* highlight that the alleged "impurity" of the mother of Jesus was one significant cause of the Christological controversy.
 - c. This is vague: There are negative and positive elements to monastic movements.
 - d. This is not vague: St. Jerome's *Letter to Eustochium* offers a compelling critique of Roman notions of purity, one that suggests a new set of distinguishing criteria for female behavior.

So you have a good thesis? That is great, but do not be smug; you still need to fulfill your promise, and actually *do* what you claim you will do.