

## Five Kinds of Weak Thesis Statements

This is an abridged handout with language taken from *Writing Analytically*, pp. 255-64. Be sure to check the text book for extended explanations and examples.

### 1. A thesis that makes no claim (“This paper examines the pros and cons of...”)

**Problem:** these theses “name a subject,” but make no claim about it. Thus “there is... nothing at stake, no issue to be resolved.”

**Solution:** “Raise specific issues for the essay to explore.”

### 2. A thesis that is obviously true or a statement of fact (“Exercise is good for you.”)

**Problem:** “A thesis needs to be an assertion with which it is possible for readers to disagree.”

**Solution:** “Find some avenue of inquiry – a question about the facts or an issue raised by them. Make an assertion with which it would be possible to disagree.”

### 3. A thesis that restates conventional wisdom (“Love conquers all”)

**Problem:** These are cultural clichés, not claims. Your reader won’t *learn* anything from your essay.

**Solution:** Complicate the claim... “avoid conventional wisdom unless you can qualify it or introduce a fresh perspective on it.”

### 4. A thesis that offers personal conviction as the basis for the claim (“Shopping malls are wonderful places”)

**Problem:** These claims assume that your opinion *must* be right, and that any reader *must* agree with you, regardless of evidence.

**Solution:** “Treat your ideas as hypothesis to be tested rather than obvious truths.”

### 5. A thesis that makes an overly broad claim (“Individualism is good.”)

**Problem:** “Overly generalized theses avoid complexity... [and] usually lead to either say-nothing theses or to reductive either/or thinking. [They] say nothing in particular about the subject...”

**Solution:** “Convert broad categories and generic claims to more specific, more qualified assertions; find ways to bring out the complexity of your subject.”

## Rephrasing Weak Thesis Statements

In addition to the strategies above, you can address many of these issues by paying close attention to the structure and syntax of your thesis statement. **Complicated ideas usually need complicated forms.**

### 1. Specify

**Verbs:** Replace “is” and “are” with stronger verbs that express your claim more exactly.

**Key Terms:** Replace general and abstract terms (like “positive” or “justice”) with a more exact term.

### 2. Subordinate: Rank one of the two items in your thesis underneath the other by using “although,” “while,” or “though” (e.g. “Although violent revolutions begin to redress long-standing social inequities, they often do so at the cost of long-term economic dysfunction and the suffering that attends it.”)