

# Some tips on writing a thesis-statement...

A **thesis** can have many forms as long as it poses a question and offers an interpretive answer. Here is a formula to help you remember key parts of a thesis:

Why did [person/persons] [do/say/write something surprising]? [Possible explanation], but in fact [better or more complete explanation].

1. **Why?** Theses answer the question, why, or, occasionally, how. Who, what, where, and when are important too, but why and how make an argument.

2. **Person/persons.** A thesis without people lacks life.

3. **Something surprising.** The goal of any research is to explore the unknown and the mysterious. Challenge yourself with difficult questions.

4. **Possible explanation.** A good way to know that you have formed a good question is if it forces you to choose among interpretations. The question, who wrote “Confessions of an Economic Hit Man”? has only one right answer (John Perkins). The question, *why* did Perkins write “Confessions of an Economic Hit Man”? has many possible answers. The most thorough theses note exactly who believes or believed an alternative explanation.

5. **Better or more complete explanation.** Not all answers are equally good. Some are plain wrong; they cannot be supported with evidence. Others account for some, but not all, of the available evidence. The task of a thesis is to show that your explanation explains words or deeds that were not explained before.

Not all good thesis statements need to take this particular form, but most good theses present all of these elements. Show that your argument can explain more evidence than can a rival, and you have yourself a thesis.