



Topic and Thesis Differences

A **topic** is the subject one decides to write about. It can be as general as “vegetables” and as specific as “how tomatoes can improve a person’s metabolism.”

A **thesis** is what one decides to say about the “topic.” The thesis is a specific argument that will be involved in every paragraph of the paper whether one is introducing it, defending it, or reinforcing it. It is the sole reason for the paper’s existence and should be one written as a well-constructed sentence that acts as a map for how the paper will unfold.

Here are a few examples of topics and possible theses for each one.

Topic: “Gardens and the Environment”

Thesis: “Gardening is helpful to nature, and brings mankind closer to it, but it can be a threat to the environment’s delicate ecosystem.”

Topic: “Biography of Freud”

Thesis: “Freud’s influence is far-reaching; however, his life was affected by an early childhood experience, and one can see a pattern of inner turmoil in his life.”

Topic: “Topics and Theses”

Thesis: “Topics and theses must never be confused because they differ in three ways, and though they share similarities as well as differences, a strong thesis is the support of a well written paper.”

Topic: “Dogs and Cats”

Thesis: “Dogs and cats are great pets to have because they are soft, cuddly, and loyal.”

Choosing and successfully defending a thesis can sometimes be difficult. The following are some common mistakes to avoid.

Wandering Thesis

Each paper is only meant to have **one** thesis. This means that whatever one says, whatever arguments are brought into the paper, everything must be centered on the one statement the writer decided to defend: the thesis. However, all too often, writers begin their papers with one idea in mind and stray to another idea halfway through the writing process. For instance, if a thesis is “The thematic unity in *Gone with the Wind* centers around Scarlett’s selfishness, entitlement, and snobbery,” it is not appropriate to spend a great deal of time discussing the importance of one of the minor characters. Although both ideas may apply to the novel, the paper is meant to have only **one** thesis. Bringing in any points that do not directly support and affirm the original statement only confuse the reader and make the audience unclear of the author’s intentions for the paper.

Wrong-sized Thesis

It is important to understand the necessary length of the thesis before starting the paper. It would be unwise for a two-page essay to have a thesis that could continue on for ten or twenty more pages. However, if one is tasked with producing a twenty-page essay, it would also be unfitting to use a thesis that could only be written about for a few paragraphs. The thesis, depending on the assignment, should be wide enough to support a few pages of written material, but it should also be narrow enough to be covered thoroughly.