

## STEP 5. Synthesis: Developing The Thesis Statement



When you have gathered enough information, it is time answer your thesis question. As you gather ideas and concepts from other people, you should begin to get an idea of what the answer to your thesis question is. This is your thesis statement (or controlling idea). The thesis statement expresses the central conclusion of your research findings and is the controlling idea of your essay; in essence, it states what you are trying to prove.

Generally: a good thesis will generally have the following characteristics:

1. A good thesis statement will make a claim. Develop an interesting perspective that you can support and defend. This perspective must be more than an observation. “America is violent” is an observation. “Americans are violent because they are fearful” (the position that Michael Moore takes in *Bowling For Columbine*) is an argument. Why? Because it states an opinion. It makes a claim.
2. A good thesis statement will control the entire argument. Your thesis sentence determines what you are required to say in a paper. It also determines what you cannot say. Every paragraph in your paper exists in order to support your thesis. Accordingly, if one of your paragraphs seems irrelevant to your thesis you have two choices: get rid of the paragraph, or rewrite your thesis.

Adapted from Karen Gocsik’s “Developing Your Thesis.” *Dartmouth Writing Program*. Dartmouth College, 12 July 2005, [writing-speech.dartmouth.edu](http://writing-speech.dartmouth.edu).

### Examples of Thesis Statements (Controlling Ideas):

The major cause of the Civil War was the expansion of slavery into the newly opened U.S. territories.

While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.

The Irish Famine (1845-1849) resulted not merely from a blight that devastated the potato crop but from Britain’s social and economic policies in Ireland.

Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave “civilized” society and go back to nature.

Because half of all American elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.