

# Thesis Statements

You have your assignment and you've chosen your topic. Once you've spent some time exploring the material you want to use and organizing your observations, you will need to start developing your thesis – the central argument of your paper.

## What is a thesis?

The thesis is the central point or argument of an essay. The thesis statement, in one or two sentences, expresses that central point or argument.

A good thesis statement is **NOT a statement of fact**:

× Métis artist Christi Belcourt primarily paints large floral motifs.

It is also **NOT a statement of intent**:

× This essay will examine Belcourt's floral motifs to discuss Indigenous environmental activism.

**A good thesis statement is a statement of position that requires evidence in the body of the essay for support.**

## Taking a stance

Don't confuse your topic with your thesis. The assignment *topic* outlines the general scope of your project. Your *thesis* focuses your discussion of that topic. A thesis is a statement that takes a position or offers an interpretation of the subject. It is not just a description or statement of fact.

For example:

*Métis artist Christi Belcourt primarily paints large floral motifs*

is not a thesis but a statement of fact. There is no position to argue. Try again.

*Christi Belcourt paints large floral motifs inspired by Métis beadwork as a form of environmental activism.*

This is better. The statement not only refers to certain facts but also interprets them. The writer implies that the content and style of these paintings defines their use as a form of environmental activism. Another essay might view Belcourt's art from a different angle—for example, arguing instead that her work makes Indigenous history and memory more visible as a form of protest against Canada's colonial violence. As long as the points are clear and convincingly argued, either of these approaches would be fair game as a thesis.

# What/How/Why

One way to develop a concise thesis is to organize your thoughts around a What/How/Why strategy. This method can help you move from a **descriptive** position to an **interpretive** one.

- **WHAT:** the topic or incident to be examined (e.g., Christi Belcourt’s art)
- **HOW:** the means by which the topic will be examined—examples, themes, key images—i.e., the major discussion points of your essay (e.g., use of floral patterns inspired by Métis beadwork; thematic focus on human-environment relationships)
- **WHY:** your interpretation of the events, topic, etc.; the significance of examining the topic from the angle you have chosen; your conclusions (i.e., the “so what?” of your argument) (e.g., Belcourt’s art is a form of environmental activism)

With these factors in mind, a more fully developed thesis statement might look like this:

Through the use of floral patterns inspired by Métis beadwork, Christi Belcourt calls attention to human-environment relationships and demonstrates how art can be a tool for environmental activism.

When using a **what/how/why** breakdown, the heart of the thesis usually rests in the **why** statement. A thesis that only addresses **what** and **how** usually ends up being merely descriptive. The **why** component foregrounds your interpretation of the data presented, which is the core of your paper. What your reader is most interested in is *your* take on the information—your interpretation or approach to the matter at hand—not just a summary of the details involved.

A thesis statement that answers **what/how/why** in one to two sentences gives your paper a precise focus. It shows your reader that you know where you’re going and why it is worthwhile to get there.

## References

Belcourt, C. (2021, May 27). *Biography*. <http://christibelcourt.com/bio/>.

## Three Examples of Thesis Statements

### 1. The simple statement of position

*As a democracy, Canada offers only limited rights and privileges to its citizens.*

*“Ng’s novel Little Fires Everywhere . . . explores the theme of maternal rights. . . through multiple characters.” (Williams, 2021)*

### 2. The roadmap thesis statement includes supporting points in the order they will appear:

*Canada offers only limited rights and privileges to its citizens because of the persistence of a class structure and limited accessibility to both the political process and higher education.*



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*“Ng’s novel Little Fires Everywhere . . . explores the theme of maternal rights . . . through multiple characters across the spectrum of race, class, and citizenship.” (Williams, 2021)*

*“Unable to access white legal, social, and educational structures, Parks’ Hester creates alternative modes of protest and power.” (Williams, 2021)*

### **3. The complex thesis statement can accommodate two sides of an issue.**

*Although Canada affords its citizens many democratic rights and privileges, those rights and privileges are limited by the persistence of a class structure and limited accessibility to both the political process and higher education.*

*Canada affords its citizens many democratic rights and privileges. However, those rights and privileges are limited by the persistence of a class structure and limited accessibility to both the political process and higher education.*

*Although the settings in Jane Eyre place the novel in the Victorian gothic tradition, they serve primarily to support the theme of orphanhood by emphasizing Jane’s alienation, loneliness, and poverty.*

## **References**

Williams, S. S. (2021). Revising *The Scarlet Letter*: Race and Motherhood in *In the Blood* and *Little Fires Everywhere*. *Adaptation: the journal of literature on screen studies*, 2021-03-22. Retrieved May 27, 2021, from <https://doi-org.proxy.queensu.ca/10.1093/adaptation/apab006>.