

THESIS STATEMENT:

In the context of qualitative research, a thesis statement is a concise answer (without evidence) to a research question.

The thesis statement must have the same focus and scope as the research question.

See below for a detailed discussion of Thesis and Hypothesis:

- **Copied from Adu-Febiri & Ofori (2009), *Succeeding from the Margins of Canadian Society*, Chapter 17**

A presentation provides an answer to a central question, and the focal point of the answer is the thesis statement. A thesis in a research essay or term paper is the counterpart of the hypothesis of a quantitative research report (Giarrusso *et al* 2001, p. 143). A thesis statement, like a hypothesis, is usually a contentious/debatable claim or an assertion about a topic, that is, an answer to a central question that some would disagree with. For example, on the topic Leisure among Canadian Racial Minorities, a thesis statement may be, “The major leisure activities of Canadian racial minorities do not include traveling for pleasure.” However, according to Northey and Tepperman (1993), a good thesis must go beyond a mere assertion. “Remember to be as specific as possible in creating a thesis, in order to focus your essay. Don’t just make an assertion – give the main reason for it” (Northey and Tepperman 1993, pp. 12 and 13). In this case the above thesis must be changed to, “The major leisure activities of Canadian racial minorities don’t include traveling for pleasure because of racism.” Specifically,

- A thesis is a clear overall point/idea that is usually made up of an opinion and the main supporting reason(s) for that opinion in response to the central question asked about your topic.
- The thesis statement is the punch line of your argument.
- In short, a thesis is a brief, specific statement about a topic that may include or exclude supporting reason(s).

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Characteristics of a good thesis/hypothesis: A good thesis/hypothesis:

- “Is narrow enough to be workable” (Northey and Tepperman 1993, p. 11).
- Creates “a line of argument for which you can supply adequate supporting evidence” (Northey and Tepperman 1993, p. 11).
- Has only one central idea.
- Goes beyond assertion (an assertion plus a reason).
- Avoids vague or ambiguous terms.

Uses of a thesis/hypothesis: The thesis serves as:

- A planning device that guides the collection and organization of information

on a topic (Northey and Tepperman 1993, p. 13).

- A beacon towards which your project is steered (Floyd 1995, p. 25).
- A reference point for your argument (Floyd 1995, p. 25).

Creating a good working thesis/hypothesis:

☐ **Get a topic:**

- From academic literature, observations, and/or the mass media
e.g.: Gender and Cheating in Examinations

☐ **Create a central question:**

- Why do Canadian girls cheat more in examinations than Canadian boys?

In the social sciences a central question is not answered with a simple

“yes” and/or “no.”

☐ **Form an opinion:**

- A thesis/hypothesis idea usually emerges as a response to a central question. For example, “Canadian girls cheat more in examinations than Canadian boys because of gender bias in the education system,” could be an opinionated answer to the above central question.
- A thesis/hypothesis may also emerge from patterns, connections, or gaps you see in academic literature, observations, and/or the mass media.

☐ **Check your opinion against the essay topic:**

- If the opinion you have formed is relevant to the topic go to the next step below. If not re-examine your information and/or opinion.

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☐ **Support your opinion:**

- The reasons you give to support your opinion will not be anecdotes or individual details. Your reasons will usually refer to general categories or sub-categories.
- You can make your supporting reasons more specific and precise when you revise your thesis in light of the material you gather and analyze.
e.g.: Canadian girls cheat more in examinations than Canadian boys because of the weaknesses of Canada’s education system.

Refining your thesis:

☐ **Revise your thesis:** Your thesis needs revision if it:

- **Merely restates the topic:** If the topic is “Gender and Cheating in Examinations,” then “This essay will discuss gender and cheating in examinations” is a restatement of the topic, not a thesis.
- **Merely states facts:** e.g. if you only summarize information on gender and cheating in examinations: Canadian girls cheat more in examinations than Canadian boys by smuggling exam answers into the exam room.
- **Fails to provide supporting reasons:** e.g. Canadian girls cheat in examinations more than Canadian boys.
- **Is the same as the thesis or theme of existing text or critics:** You will

need to make a clear separation between your thesis and the overall point in any material you are examining.

- **Fails to provide a structure for your essay:** a thesis often indicates the order of points to be discussed in the essay. e.g. Canadian girls cheat more in examinations than boys because of peer pressure, home problems, and weaknesses in the school system. The points “peer pressure,” “home problems,” and “weaknesses in the school system” will be the main order of points the essay will follow.

- **Fails to reflect the body of your presentation:** a thesis must accurately reflect what you have said in the body of your essay. Therefore ensure that you change or modify your thesis to align with the body and conclusion of your essay.

□ **Exercise:**

- Is the following statement a thesis/hypothesis? Give reason(s) for your answer:

“All students have a specific teacher they claim as their favourite.”

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Conclusion

Academic presentations can be exciting and less difficult for you when you let your imagination go loose and generate questions of interest to you about the topic. With a clear STATEMENT OF A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM, an insightful single question about the topic flowing from the problem statement, a hypothesis or thesis statement can be easily deduced which would provide a clear guide for gathering evidence and a linking logic for your argument or discussion. In essence, a solution to the presentation problem is personalizing the topic through a problem statement, central question and a hypothesis or thesis statement.