

Have I Written a Strong Thesis Statement?

To check the quality of a thesis statement you've written, ask yourself some questions. Here, we've demonstrated the process with a hypothetical case. Imagine the following prompt has been assigned in a Political Science class: "Choosing one specific aspect to focus on, evaluate Ban Ki-moon's effectiveness as Secretary-General of the United Nations so far."

Have I addressed/answered the assignment prompt?

It's easy to get off topic and write a paper that doesn't address the assignment prompt. First, look for keywords in the assignment sheet that explain what kind of paper you should be writing, and underline them. Are you being asked to *analyze*, *evaluate*, *take a position*, *suggest a solution*, etc.? In the sample prompt above, the assignment is asking the writer to *evaluate* Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's performance.

Does my thesis provide a claim or state a position about a topic that someone could debate?

"Ban Ki-moon is Secretary-General of the United Nations" would not be a good thesis because it's not an evaluation and therefore doesn't address the prompt. Also, this sentence simply states a fact. Be sure you're not simply stating facts that no one else would challenge. Your thesis is your chance to convey your educated, considered position on a topic. A new version of the thesis could state, at a minimum, "Ban Ki-moon is an effective Secretary-General." By using the word "effective," you've made an evaluation, and you've made a claim that others could disagree with should they think differently. However, we don't recommend that you stop there. Keep on reading below to see why.

Have I indicated my reasoning?

Does your reader understand why or how it is that you've taken your position? Ask yourself, "What is my reasoning?" While the statement "Ban Ki-moon is an effective Secretary-General" gives an opinion, it doesn't make it clear to the reader why you've concluded this. A new version of this might read, "Ban Ki-moon is an effective Secretary-General because he is improving the lives of world citizens." Using a "because" clause ensures a good start towards creating a strong thesis.

Is my thesis *specific* enough?

In order to be as persuasive as possible, you want to make sure that your position is as specific as it can be. What aspect of world citizens' lives does Ban Ki-moon care about improving? Also, remember that the assignment asked you to identify "one specific aspect" of Ban Ki-moon's leadership. Let us revise the thesis again: "Ban Ki-moon is an effective Secretary-General because he is improving the lives of world citizens by promoting sustainable development initiatives."

Will someone ask "So what?" about my thesis?

While the thesis "Ban Ki-moon is an effective Secretary-General because he is improving the lives of world citizens by promoting sustainable development initiatives" is a fairly strong working thesis, your readers might find themselves asking "So what?" How can you make your reader understand why you're writing a paper about this topic (aside from the obvious that it was assigned to you in a class)?

Has Ban Ki-moon been reproached for being an ineffective Secretary-General? Are some people unhappy with his performance? Let's revise the thesis one more time, to place the claim in the context of a debate: "While Ban Ki-moon has received criticism from some world leaders for failing to mobilize rapid enough change, he has been effective at improving the lives of world citizens by promoting sustainable development initiatives."

As you can see, this hypothetical thesis went through many stages of revision before reaching a point where it performs all the tasks that a strong thesis should.

Remember to ask yourself the above questions the next time you write a thesis statement to see if it is strong, effective, and addresses/answers your assignment prompt.

Don't forget: always follow *your instructor's guidelines* for the paper you've been asked to write.