

Understanding the Thesis Statement Through Its Three Parts

The thesis statement should accomplish two things:

1. It should give the reader a clear statement on the perspective or argument of the paper
2. It should be an organizing device to help the writer think through and present thoughts in a systematic way

The three parts of a thesis statement (C-S-C):

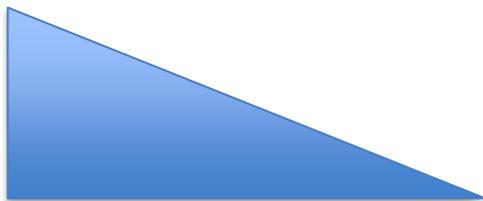
1. Context: places the reader in the general area of discussion or frame of reference
2. Subject: directs the reader's attention to the focus of the paper
3. Claim: tells the reader what argument regarding the subject the paper will make

Example: In America today, the documented increase in childhood emotional disorders reflects changes
context **subject**
in institutional practices rather than a deterioration of family values.
claim

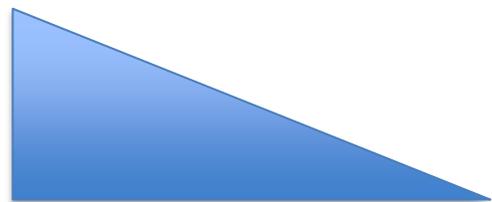
Potential problems with the subject:

1. The subject is too broad
2. The subject is too narrow
3. The subject is too vague

For subjects that are too broad (the most common problem), you can use the “shift left” method. The graduated triangle represents an appropriate C-S-C statement. Use the shift left method by shifting the subject to the left and into the context position.



Context → Subject → Claim
21st C dating is very different today
than it was 50 years ago



Context → Subject → Claim
dating changes in dating behavior
over past 50 yrs reflect a growing
acceptance in our society of
feminist principles

Essentials of claims:

1. A claim is something that **can be supported**
 - a. Sometimes called the “so what” of the paper or the “twist” or “angle” that the thesis gives or puts on the subject
 - b. After you have developed a thesis you should ask yourself “so what?”
2. A claim should be **debatable**; that is valid alternative viewpoints should be possible
3. A claim should **reveal a perceptive point**
 - a. It should reflect an imaginative or provocative view on the subject, and it should be interesting and have resonance
 - b. There is no hidden “correct” answer you are trying to uncover. Instead you should develop an interesting point using your own imagination and intelligence

Potential problems with the claim:

1. A claim should not be self-evident (*In Shakespeare’s corpus of work, the play Romeo and Juliet is a tragic love story.*)
 - a. Instead it should generate debate and interest (*Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet presents the view that love has the power to reform a community.*)
2. A claim should not be a statement of fact (*Cell phones have changed our society.*)
 - a. Instead it should be an insightful assertion that offers an opportunity for disagreement (*Although cell phones make communication easier, they in fact have brought about a society where people are increasingly isolated from one another.*)
3. A claim should not be a statement of summary (*As one of the many films that depict human atrocities, Steven Spielberg’s film Saving Private Ryan presents the horrors of war.*)
 - a. Instead it should be an interpretation of a subject (*Steven Spielberg’s Saving Private Ryan argues that the horrors of war bring out the goodness in humans.*)
4. A claim should not be a statement of a plan (*This paper will examine the reasons why rottweilers are chosen as pets.*)
 - a. This simply states the organization of the essay rather than presenting an insightful observation or point (*While insurance companies, among others, believe that rottweilers are dangerous dogs, the qualities natural to the breed make them ideal pets.*)