6.12: Revising a Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement will probably change as you write so that it reflects exactly what you discuss in your paper. Remember, you will begin with a working thesis statement, an indefinite statement that you make about your topic early in the writing process.

Working thesis statements will become stronger as you gather information and form new opinions and reasons for those opinions. Revisions will help you strengthen your thesis so that it matches what you have expressed in the body of your paper. See Table 6.4 for ways to remove irrelevant parts and revise your thesis.

Table 6.4: Revising a thesis

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<th>Step</th>
<th>Revision</th>
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<td>Identify and replace all nonspecific words, such as people, everything, society, or life, with more precise words to reduce any vagueness.</td>
<td>Working thesis: University students have to work hard to succeed in school.</td>
<td>The revised thesis makes a more specific statement about success and what it means to work hard. The original includes too broad a range of people and does not define exactly what success entails. By replacing the general words like university students and work hard, you can better focus your research and gain more direction in your writing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revised thesis: Nursing students must have discipline and persistence to manage their course workload and be successful in their course evaluations.</td>
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Clarify ideas that need explanation by asking questions that narrow your thesis.

Working thesis: The welfare system is a joke.

Revised thesis: The welfare system prevents people in the lower socioeconomic class from gaining employment by alluring members of that class with unearned income, instead of programs to improve their education and skill sets.

Joke means many things to many people. Readers bring all sorts of backgrounds and perspectives to the reading process and would need clarification for a word so vague. This expression may also be too informal for the selected audience. By asking questions, you can devise a more precise and appropriate explanation for joke. By incorporating the answers to these questions into a thesis statement, you more accurately define your stance, which will better guide the writing of the essay.

Replace linking verbs with action verbs. Linking verbs do provide information about a subject, such as a condition or relationship (is, appear, smell, sound), but they do not describe any action. The most common linking verb is any forms of the verb to be, a verb that simply states that a situation exists.

Working thesis: Individuals who are homeless are not receiving adequate healthcare.

Revised thesis: The Canadian healthcare system is not providing sufficient funding to support individuals who are homeless, resulting in inequitable healthcare resources and inadequately diverse approaches to provide required services and access to healthcare.

The linking verb in this working thesis statement is the word: are. Linking verbs often make thesis statements weaker because they do not express action. Reading the original thesis statement, readers might wonder why individuals who are homeless are not receiving adequate healthcare; the statement does not compel you to ask many more questions. You should ask yourself questions in order to replace the linking verb with an action verb, thus forming a stronger thesis statement – one that takes a more definitive stance on the issue. For example: Who is not providing adequate healthcare to individuals who are homeless? What is considered adequate? What is the problem? What are the results?

Omit any general claims that are hard to support.

Working thesis: Today’s adolescents are too sexualized.

Revised thesis: Adolescents who are captivated by the sexual images on MTV are conditioned to believe that a person’s worth depends on their sexuality, a feeling that harms their self-esteem and

It is true that some adolescents in today’s society are more sexualized than in the past, but that is not true for all. Many adolescents have strict parents, dress modestly, and do not engage in sexual activity while in middle school or high school. Here, it would be helpful to ask questions like: Which adolescents? What constitutes too sexualized? Why are they choosing certain behaviours over others? Where does this behaviour show up? What are the repercussions?
Student Tip

Ask Questions about Your Thesis Statement

The best way to revise your thesis statement is to ask questions about it and then examine the answers to those questions. By challenging your own ideas and forming definite reasons for those ideas, you can move toward a more precise point of view, which you can then incorporate into your thesis statement.

Activity: Beware of the Pitfalls!

Some working thesis statements are provided below. Use the steps you have just learned to revise the working thesis to strengthen the statement.

- Working Thesis: Today’s university students have too much stress in their life.
- Working Thesis: Children are not exercising enough.

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