

## PURPOSE, THEME or THESIS: Which is Which?

**Purpose:** The inspiration or desire of the author to discuss a specific idea or topic in writing. This is also the moment the author decides what impact or influence his writing will have on the audience – it may be to inform, or to persuade/convince the reader of a specific point.

**Theme (*also topic, idea, interest, problem*):** an area of concern the author addresses that support the larger point made in the writing. Most writing contains multiple themes. Every theme must somehow *relate back to the thesis, and support it*. One way to look at themes is to think of them as reasons or considerations for why the thesis is true.

**Thesis:** It is a complete sentence that expresses the main idea/message/primary point an author is trying to get across to the reader. It can also be viewed as the central belief, fundamental claim/conclusion, most crucial point made by the author, or the core argument. It states the *main idea* AND establishes that *the author will prove/explain/demonstrate that point* through the writing. The thesis should be specific (so it can be manageable), contain a specific topic/theme, and a clear comment about that theme (that the rest of the writing will support).

***Here are two ways to look at the structure of a thesis statement:***

**Topic** (states main idea) + **Comment** (makes an important, specific point about the topic)

**Central Idea** (point to prove) + **Promise to the Reader** (how the writer is going to prove it)

**What IS a thesis?** It is a specific statement/point that is concise and challenges the reader to think beyond the obvious. The writer zooms in one aspect of a topic, takes a stand on it and expresses a judgment. The rest of the writing serves to support that central idea.

### What a thesis IS NOT!

**It is NOT a title** – a thesis is a complete sentence.

**Title:** How to Grow Roses

**Thesis:** Growing roses successfully takes skill, patience and specific knowledge.

**It is NOT an announcement** (the “I’m gonna tell ya” approach).

**Announcement:** I want to explain my thoughts about the space program.

**Thesis:** The U.S. government’s space program is a feel-good waste of tax dollars that could be better spent in other ways.

**It is NOT a statement of fact.** A thesis should express an idea that is **debatable**, and needs to be discussed and supported.

**Fact:** The first polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.

**Thesis:** The idea that truth can be physically measured has been controversial since the introduction of the polygraph in 1921.

Also, **beware of statements** that are really identifying an **author’s purpose** or **theme** (one of many addressed in the writing), or arguing something **too obvious** or **too broad** that a reader doesn’t really know what point is trying to be made.