Crafting a Thesis Statement

An effective thesis makes an original claim about an important problem and hones that claim by gesturing toward the essay’s supporting proofs. It thus has two parts:

- **The Claim.** This is the part that puts forth what *you* think—as opposed to what others might imagine—about your topic. The claim points *back* to the introduction, because it tries to answer the question the introduction posed.

- **The Support.** This is the part where you indicate why your reader should believe your claim. The support points *forward* to the body of the essay, using key terms from body paragraphs to show *how* you’ll prove your claim.

The following thesis features a challenging claim and specific support. It comes from an essay about a colonial-era story of captivity among Native Americans.

*Jemison’s story challenged European stereotypes about “savages”* by placing her violent kidnapping *in context of the Native Americans’ values of family loyalty and warrior honor.*

This thesis puts forth a **strong claim:** despite what you might think, this story of kidnapping and captivity presented a sympathetic view of Native American culture. It also provides specific support, signaling that the essay will use ideas of “family loyalty” and “warrior honor” to place the violent parts of the story in a more favorable light.

**What To Avoid**

**All support/no claim:** A thesis without a claim leaves one asking, “and your point is?”

*This paper will analyze Mary Jemison’s description of family life, morality, and violence in Seneca culture.*

**All claim/no support:** A bold claim with no support leaves one asking, “Why!? How!?"

*Though her story includes frightening details of her violent abduction, I still think Jemison challenged European stereotypes about “savages.”*

**Listing.** Strive to connect your supporting points instead of listing them randomly. What led to what? What explains what?

**Listed:** *The slave owners justified their inhuman cruelty using ideas of religious discipline, of paternalism, and of the supposed “crimes” of the Africans.*

**Connected:** *The slave owners justified this inhuman cruelty by using the slaves’ “crimes” to imply they were like children who needed correction with Christian discipline.*