

## Three Characteristics of a Strong Thesis/Argument

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A good thesis or argument will determine a good paper. Write a clear, precise thesis and the rest of the essay will be much easier to write (because you'll know what steps you need to take to demonstrate your thesis). If you write without a strong thesis, you write without purpose, and it will show in the final product. Here are three characteristics of a strong thesis or argument.

### **1. You can argue against it.**

Make sure your thesis is not simply a statement of fact. "The Hatt-i Sharif was promulgated in 1839" is a statement of fact. You cannot argue against it. Your thesis should instead be based on interpretation, rooted in evidence. A revised version of the initial thesis might instead be: "The Hatt-i Sharif was promulgated in 1839, which initiated a profound transformation in the way Ottoman subjects viewed their relationship with sovereign power." Such a thesis immediately reflects a position that calls for evidence-based demonstration.

### **2. It is not easy to prove.**

If your thesis is a restatement of common knowledge or an obvious point drawn from sources, it might not be worth making. For example, "The story of Assaf exemplifies economic change in nineteenth century Lebanon" is an obvious point rather than a thesis. If, however, you change it to "The story of Assaf exemplifies the social displacement of the Lebanese peasantry due to the collapse of the silk industry in the late nineteenth century," you've moved closer to a thesis. We now have to show that Assaf's story of economic migration was typical of a certain class of the Lebanese peasantry at a particular historical moment in relation to a particular industry.

### **3. You are explaining something (that isn't obvious)**

If a thesis describes rather than explains, it will not be effective. "The Tanzimat was an ambitious program of state reform that had varying effects on Ottoman society" is a true statement, but it doesn't tell us very much. If you change it to "The Tanzimat was an ambitious program of state reform, which, contrary to past interpretations, drew equally from the Islamic tradition of political theory as it did Western liberal thought" it begins to offer an explanation that is not immediately obvious.