



Research Thesis Handout

Formulating an Original, Focused, Relevant, and Debatable Research Thesis

Introduction

In this section, you will learn through a series of examples what makes a thesis original, focused, relevant, and debatable. These are perhaps the most important characteristics of a thesis for the research paper.

Research Thesis – Original, Focused, Relevant, Debatable

I. Original

Make sure that your research thesis is original, viewing the issue from a fresh angle, establishing unique relationships between its aspects, and exploring new and uncharted territory. Below are two examples of a thesis on a similar topic, one of which is not original enough (too cliché), while the next one is more original and unique.

Examples:

- **Too Cliché:** *The disproportionate levels of mass incarceration of people of color demonstrates racism in the criminal justice system.*
- **More Original:** *Even though slavery and segregation are officially over, the criminal justice system plays the gate keeper of the modern Jim Crow laws with the practice of mass incarceration of people of color and thereby legitimately denying them basic civil rights.*

II. Focused

Make sure that your research thesis is focused on a specific part(s) of a broad issue and is yet not too narrow. A narrow thesis will be interesting only to a select few readers, and it will be harder to find enough supporting sources to support such a statement.

Examples:

- **Too Broad:** Water Pollution has a negative effect on humanity.
- **Too Narrow:** The hazardous chemicals of CFC, PVC, and mercury contained in the refrigerator door that swam up ashore the KCC beach in 2012 had a negative effect on the students, faculty, staff, and visitors who would use the beach.
- **Well-Focused:** Since the oceans supply the planet with the majority of the oxygen as well as nutrients in the form of sea life, polluting its waters with chemicals, plastics, and other harmful materials can adversely affect humankind by raising carbon levels and adding toxins to the fish consumed.

III. Relevant

Unless it falls within the scope of a particular subject/region/time period, make sure that your research thesis reflects current issues and encompasses the interests/concerns of a large audience.

Examples:

- **Too Far-Fetched/Outdated:** The Marxist class struggle of exploitation and alienation is reflected in the medieval practices of lords using serfs to work their farms and paying rent to them.
- **More Relevant:** The Marxist class struggle of exploitation and alienation is reflected in the tipping culture of the United States where waiters are expected to work long shifts with their pay dependent on customers' tips rather than steady wages by employers.

IV. Debatable

Make sure that your research thesis invites challenge, debate, or at least room for further probing/research rather than just stating facts or making a statement virtually everybody would agree on.

Examples:

- **Too Factual:** Virtually every developed country in the world except for the United States has abolished the death penalty for all crimes.
- **Too Indisputable:** Death penalty is a state-sanctioned killing.
- **More Debatable:** Even though the proponents of the death penalty may believe executions deliver justice while simultaneously ensuring deterrence and incapacitation, it is a practice that, aside from being inhumane, fails deterrence by creating a nothing-to-lose situation and offers irreversible incapacitation.

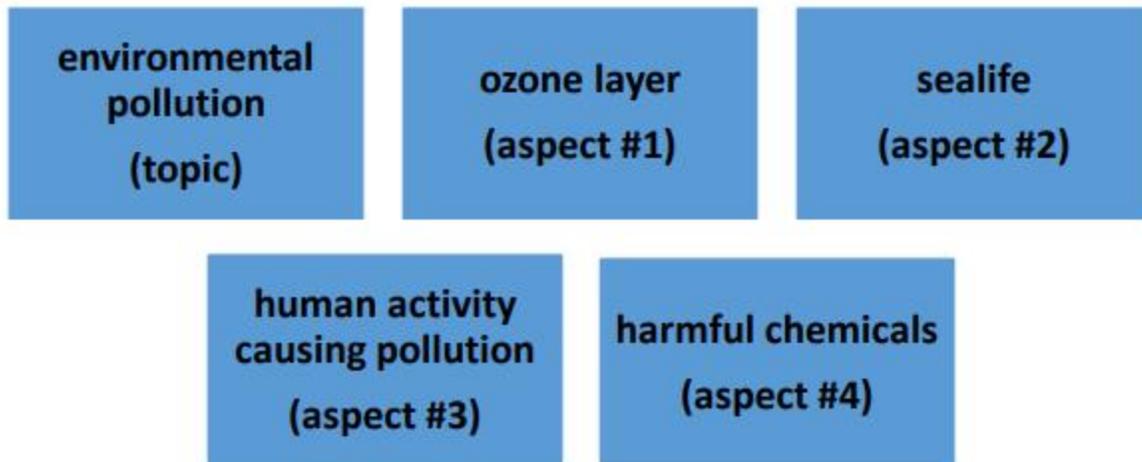
Research Thesis: a Step-by-Step Formulation

In this section, you will practice generating your own thesis by starting with a topic, narrowing your focus, brainstorming connections between ideas, and ultimately making your thesis original, focused, relevant, and debatable.

Step 1. Think of a broad topic, any topic that could be of interest.

e.g. mental health, police brutality, death penalty, environmental pollution, education, etc.

Step 2. Write down aspects of the topic (environmental pollution, in the example below) that narrow the focus of your research.



Step 3. Create a three-column table, listing the aspects in the left and the right column; think of relationships between aspects, as well as pertaining questions, and jot them in the middle column.

e.g. **Topic:** *Environmental Pollution*

Aspects	Relationship/Questions	Aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ozone layer ✓ Sealife 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Harmful chemicals thinning the ozone layer ✓ Sealife and humans inter-affected during environmental pollution ✓ How does the thinning of the ozone layer due to human activity affect the Sealife ✓ Why do certain chemical make the sea environment unlivable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Human activity causing pollution ✓ Harmful chemicals

Step 4. After evaluating relationships and pondering answers to questions, come up with 2-3 tentative theses that are original, focused, relevant, and debatable.

Examples:

Tentative Thesis #1: *Since polluted waters create health hazards resulting in liability, stench resulting in unpleasant living habitat, and erosions resulting in disappearance of beaches, it can have a negative economic impact on the tourist businesses. environmental pollution (topic) ozone layer (aspect #1) sea life (aspect #2) human activity causing pollution (aspect #3) harmful chemicals (aspect #4)*

Tentative Thesis #2: *The debris of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch extinguishes sea life through entrapment of species, nutritional deprivation, and release of toxins.*

Tentative Thesis #3: *Industrialized societies see increased levels of diseases related to cancers, vision impairment, and compromising the immune system due to the combination of releasing harmful by-products into the atmosphere and the ensuing UV radiation due to holes in the ozone layer.*

Step 5. Think of specific aspects that you plan to discuss in order to prove your thesis (e.g. specific health hazards proven to be a liability, the chemistry behind bad odor, agents of erosion, etc.) and do additional research. Below, you will find suggestions for databases, newspapers, and websites that may be helpful in the research process:

- Academic databases on the KCC Library Page (Ebsco, JSTOR, Google Scholars, etc.)
- Subject specific databases also available on Library page (Environmental Complete, Science in Context, Business Insights, etc.)
- Reputable newspapers and magazines (*The New York Times*, *The Daily News*, *National Geographic*, *Reader's Digest*, etc.)
- Government and academia endorsed websites ending in *.gov* or *.edu* (Environmental Protection Agency www.EPA.gov, Florida Institute of Oceanography www.FIO.USF.edu)
- Interviews with people who have academic/professional expertise in the field (professors, researchers, government officials, concerned residents, etc.)

Be careful NOT to use sources such as:

- Private websites and blogs
- Wikipedia
- Publications by organizations with a biased agenda
- Hearsay

Step 6: Once you have completed your research, pick the thesis that you have found the most of the reliable sources on.

Note: Even though you may have picked a specific thesis, if you come up with another one later in the writing process that seems more promising, it is perfectly fine to change your mind.

Exercise: Circle the more Original, Focused, Relevant, and Debatable Research

Below are four pairs of sample research thesis statements. Read each thesis from the pair very carefully and, afterwards, circle the one that seems to be better fit for the respective category indicated:

1. More Original

Thesis #1: With its emphasis on cardio and endurance, built-in teamwork, and worldwide popularity, the sport of soccer develops physical stamina, promotes mental health, and contributes to understanding and appreciation of cultural differences.

Thesis #2: As the most popular and economic sport in the world, soccer is easy to play and fun to watch.

2. More Focused

Thesis #1: Self-contained special education classes alienate students with special needs.

Thesis #2: Even though the purpose of the self-contained special education classes is to address learning disabilities, the lack of exposure into the regular classroom environment deprives the learners of valuable academic, socio-emotional, and occupational growth opportunities.

3. More Relevant

Thesis #1: The recent overturn of Roe vs. Wade can have a particularly negative impact of women of low-income communities, for residents of those communities lack the reliable healthcare, social support, and economic means for adequate carrying on of the pregnancy.

Thesis #2: The provisions of the 3rd Amendment about housing a soldier during war time only as “prescribed” by law had a positive impact of the homeowners in the 18th century, for it took away the strain on their living arrangements, familial interactions, and finances.

4. More Debatable

Thesis #1: The NYC public school system is the most segregated school system in the United States.

Thesis #2: The huge income disparities, combined with redlined zoning laws, promote the de facto segregation of the NYC public schools.