

Swarthmore College

Works

Teaching & Learning Commons Digital
Resources

Teaching & Learning Commons

2024

Thesis

Craig Williamson
Swarthmore College, cwillia1@swarthmore.edu

Raima Evan
Bryn Mawr College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://works.swarthmore.edu/tlc-digital-resources>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Craig Williamson and Raima Evan. (2024). "Thesis".
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/tlc-digital-resources/5>

An [accessible version](#) of this publication has been made available courtesy of Swarthmore College Libraries. For further accessibility assistance, please contact openaccess@swarthmore.edu with the title or URL of any relevant works.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 International License](#).

This work is brought to you for free by Swarthmore College Libraries' Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching & Learning Commons Digital Resources by an authorized administrator of Works. For more information, please contact myworks@swarthmore.edu.

Thesis

1. A thesis is an interpretive statement or the summary of an argument. It is not a fact.

Fact: “Perrault’s *Cinderella* is about a young woman who is treated cruelly by her step-mother and then helped by her fairy godmother to attend the Prince’s ball.”

This is a summary of the story. There is no interpretive idea at work here.

Interpretive statement/argument: “Perrault’s *Cinderella* concerns the transformation of a girl who is oppressed by her wicked stepmother. The girl uses both her wits and her fairy godmother’s magic powers to regain her rightful place as a marriageable daughter.”

2. A thesis is specific in scope. It must be specific to be provable. It should be capable of being developed in constituent parts.

A vague thesis: “The Grimms’ *Ashputtle* is very violent.”

A specific thesis: “The Grimms’ *Ashputtle* stages violence against both Ashputtle and her stepsisters. The violent physical abuse goes hand in hand with sustained emotional abuse.”

This revised thesis immediately gives the reader a sense of how the writer is going to organize the argument. From this thesis, the reader has a sense that there will be a section on the violent physical abuse against all three daughters and another on the subtle forms of emotional abuse against them. It might also include a section contrasting the forms of violence used against Cinderella and the stepsisters or a section on the relationship between physical and emotional abuse. It might also take up the question of who is responsible for the various forms of abuse.

3. A thesis is concise. If you require an entire page to spell out your thesis, your thesis requires further work. A thesis generally can be expressed in several sentences. These sentences form your thesis statement or paragraph (normally part of the opening paragraph of your paper).

4. A thesis should be interesting. It should be important. It should be provocative. It should offer the reader an argument that leads to further ramifications or considerations. These deeper levels of meaning will enable you to write a conclusion which is more than a mere restatement of your thesis. Your conclusion will allow you to extend your thesis. Often, the easiest way to turn your thesis into an important, provocative argument is simply to make it more specific, more detailed:

A thesis which could be developed: “Cinderella is not as good as everyone thinks.”

This is definitely a good idea for a thesis. However, one could make this idea more specific:

Revised thesis: “Cinderella’s greatest virtue is not so much her goodness as her capacity for deceit. She cleverly deceives her stepmother and stepsisters to move from hearth servant to beauty of the ball. She also uses mystery and surprise to win over the Prince.”

This revised thesis can help you in a variety of ways. 1) It can help you organize your ideas into different sections for the body of your paper. This way you avoid repeating yourself or getting confused about what you want to say. 2) It can also make writing a conclusion much easier. What does the story suggest about Cinderella’s obvious and hidden virtues? What does it say about the relationship between goodness and deceit? What does it suggest about the relationship between role-playing and social power? What does it say about moving beyond the limitations of one’s childhood experience? These are all possible directions your conclusion could explore.

Here are some sample theses. Which need to be redefined or reshaped? Which need to be more specific or more interesting? How can we take something that’s obvious and make it more problematic or provocative?

1. Cinderella deserves the Prince.
2. Nature is a powerful force in *Ashputtle*. So is magic.
3. *Cinderella* is a story about mothers and daughters.
4. What is the relationship between death and marriage in *Cinderella*?
5. The fish bones are crucial in the Chinese *Yeh-Shen*.