

Strengthening Your Thesis Statement

- **Courage:** Avoid confirmation bias by confronting that which contradicts you with an open mind. Do not ignore studies that appear to undermine your argument; instead, cite those works and explain why your argument is still viable.
- **Originality:** Avoid 'off the shelf' readings and aim for bespoke interpretations and applications, i.e. avoid the obvious and try to make your ideas nuanced.
- **Logic:** Look for the gaps in your logic, be ready to be wrong, and be ready to start again, or to revise your initial hypotheses.
- **Objectivity:** Employ scholarly distance (from personal, emotional, political, and ideological influences). Our job as scholars is to report and interpret the data without prejudice.
- **Support:** Face the evidence, as well as the lack of it. If you cannot support your argument with evidence, then the argument may not be viable.
- **Openness:** Be open to whatever *emerges* from the evidence, rather than superimposing a preconceived idea *onto* the evidence. Remember, critical thinking is about deduction and reason.
- **Scope:** Aim for clarity and nuance. Be realistic about what you can and cannot cover. Scope is relative to the evidence, and to the requirements of your assignment.

Starting Your Thesis Statement

1. Identify the central issues of the topic by highlighting the **key words** of the assignment.
2. Make a **spider diagram or a bullet-point list** of the keywords, all your initial ideas, and what the assignment has asked you to do.
3. Identify the **connections** or shared themes of each item on that list.
4. When you have found a central theme connecting all these issues, do some **research** into the topic to refine your ideas.
5. What is one thing you can say about all of these issues? What is true of all of them? This will narrow the topic.
6. Use the UCD Writing Centre's handout "How to Write a **Thesis Statement**" (available online) to identify the angle you want to adopt on the topic, your rationale that explains why you are adopting that angle, the significance of what you are saying.
7. Write it out in just **one sentence**.
8. Remember that you should **redraft** your thesis, and make sure it addresses **the "what", the "how", and the "why"** of the topic at hand. You will probably have to redraft your thesis after you have written your assignment.

Weak Thesis

Vs.

Strong Thesis

In this paper, I will aim to discuss the relationship between fairy tales and early childhood psychology.

- Verbs like “discuss” and “explore” are very vague; they do not reveal what the essay is trying to say.
- This statement merely announces what the topic of the essay is, rather than adopting a clear angle/ argument on that topic.
- It does not qualify anything about the nature of the relationship between fairy tales and childhood psychology, or why the author is connecting these two subjects.
- Both “fairy tales” and “childhood psychology” are broad very terms. This statement does not identify any specific aspects of either subject.
- The statement does not make it clear why this relationship is significant, or what consequences are of this relationship. Why should the reader care about what the author is saying?
- The use of the future tense (“will”) undermines the immediacy of the claim being made.
- The use of conditional phrasing (“aim to”) also undermines the authority of the writer, and it sounds uncertain about the outcome.

This essay argues that, while offering escapist entertainment value for children, the conventions of fairy tale plotlines simultaneously reveal that the psychological development of young children is centred on formulaic narrative structures. This discovery is essential for developing novel strategies in primary-level teaching and learning.

- Verbs like “argue” and “contend” instruct the reader to pay attention because it signals that *this* is the central claim being made.
- The thesis takes a clear angle on the topic at hand, i.e. that child psychology is connected to narrative structures, which is revealed by the fairy tale formula.
- The thesis outlines why they are analysing fairy tales and childhood psychology.
- The thesis narrows the focus somewhat by identifying aspects of each subject, i.e. the formulaic nature of fairy tales, and the processes of psychological development.
- This thesis statement explains why the argument is significant by outlining the consequences of having this new knowledge, i.e. it can have an impact in how we teach children and the strategies used for learning at the primary level. It also uses more urgent language, e.g. “essential”.
- The thesis uses the present tense (“argues”), which creates a sense of immediacy.
- The thesis does not use conditional like “aims to”, or “hopes to”. Instead, it makes declarative statements, which state the facts as they are, and which are more convincing.