

Your Research Project: *From Topic to Thesis*

The distinction between a topic and thesis can seem unclear for writers at the initial stage of a research process. Often, we have a sense of what it is we want to write about, but our audience (committee members, peers, etc.) may not understand what it is we're trying to express. When deciding on what to write for your MA thesis project, it is important to realize that a clear, well-formed thesis is a result of a well-defined topic; they are not exclusive. Going through the process of defining your topic will help you to establish your research goal, the primary claim you want to make, your thesis. Consider this process:

Step One. Think about your coursework. What issues or ideas have interested you? Are there any concepts/theories/tools that might be used in new ways or for a different purpose? Are there any ideas you have come across that seem to be outdated or in need of revision? Are there any gaps in the literature? Perhaps an authority has made a claim that a particular issue needs to be addressed or reconsidered.

Step Two. Find relevant, timely resources regarding this concept and ask yourself what innovation you can contribute. This does not need to be a grandiose innovation. It could be as simple as using a concept or theory for a new purpose. Or perhaps you could look at a text from a new point of view.

Step Three. Try to formalize what it is you want to say. Start by establishing what the status quo is, and then express what innovation you would like to contribute. For example:

“Previous interpretations of [insert text] have claimed _____, however, in light of (your insight here), a better interpretation may be that (your interpretation here).”

“Previously, we have used [insert concept/ philosophical tool/methodology] for _____, however it seems that it may also be used for (your new purpose here).”

“Despite the importance of [insert topic], there is little/no work that has been done on it; therefore, this study will use (insert method here) to determine (insert research goal here).”

Step Four. Test this idea out by asking your professor if this seems appropriate or adequate. They may have some suggestions for further adjustments, or may applaud you outright. When your thesis has been defined, you will simply need to decide on how you plan to prove this thesis, and what resources this will require. Your resources will vary depending on the nature of your inquiry.