

What Is A Thesis?

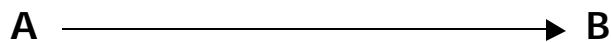
A thesis statement is as straightforward as an addition problem:

Roadmap + "So What?" = Thesis

But what does this equation mean?

Roadmap:

- ✓ Think of a thesis statement as a roadmap that gives direction to your entire paper.
- ✓ The thesis lists the major points of your paper **IN THE ORDER** in which you plan to discuss them.
- ✓ Those points serve as landmarks that help you to stay on the right path while you are writing. They also serve as a guide to aid your audience in following the direction of your paper.

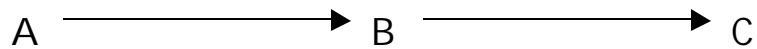


Just think, when you are following a roadmap, you have to reach point A before you can reach point B, right? The same is true in your paper. It is crucial that your thesis lists the points in the proper order, and that your paper then follows that order—otherwise, both you and your audience will get lost.

Example:

You are writing a paper on attitudes toward marriage in the Renaissance play, The Tragedy of Miriam. You want to say that the character of Herod represents the typical characteristics of Renaissance marriage in his relationship with his wife, Miriam. You have three key characteristics in mind, which are A, B, and C. In your thesis statement, you list the points in that order: A, B, C. In the paper, you must expand on those ideas in that order as well, because that is the roadmap your audience is expecting to follow.

Thus, first elaborate on point A, then on point B, then on C:



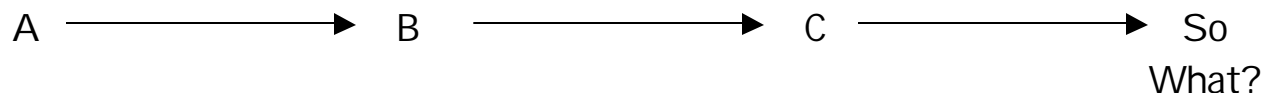
The “So What?”

When you follow a roadmap, it is usually to reach some sort of destination, right? You are following directions with a purpose, and the same is true of your paper. Your professor asks you to write a paper and you decide to analyze points A, B, and C.... SO WHAT?

- ✓ The “so what?” is the most important part of your paper.
- ✓ It is the part where you take those points and tie them together to make a greater point.
- ✓ It is the **purpose** of following the roadmap: it is your destination.

Let’s go back to our example:

So you’ve taken the time to point out the characteristics to which Herod adheres in a typical Renaissance understanding of marriage. SO WHAT? What is the point? Is there some sort of greater significance? What do these characteristics say about the play’s message or about the character of Herod? For example, although you have mentioned a few ways in which Herod abides by the typical notions of marriage, you realize that he is actually a tyrant who is both obsessive and controlling in regard to his wife. That is the “so what”!



In any case, the point of a “so what” is to pull something greater from all the analysis you do within a paper. It is finding some purpose in having followed your roadmap all the way to the end—it is reaching a worthy destination at the finish.

Creating a road map provides a more enjoyable ride both for you and your fellow “travelers!” Good luck on the journey!

*Created by Amy Criniti (WJU 2002)