

Refine and polish the thesis statement

To get to your final thesis, you'll need to refine your draft thesis so that it's **specific** and **arguable**.

- Ask if your draft thesis addresses the assignment
- Question each part of your draft thesis
- Clarify vague phrases and assertions
- Investigate alternatives to your draft thesis

Consult the example below for suggestions on how to refine your draft thesis statement.

Sample Assignment

Choose an activity and define it as a symbol of American culture. Your essay should cause the reader to think critically about the society which produces and enjoys that activity.

1. Ask

The phenomenon of drive-in facilities is an interesting symbol of American culture, and these facilities demonstrate significant characteristics of our society.

This statement does not fulfill the assignment because it does not require the reader to think critically about society.

2. Question

Drive-ins are an interesting symbol of American culture because they represent Americans' significant creativity and business ingenuity.

This statement is more precise in that it identifies two American characteristics that drive-ins appear to symbolize: creativity and ingenuity. But this assertion also seems to be one that few would argue with.

3. Clarify

Among the types of drive-in facilities familiar during the twentieth century, drive-in movie theaters best represent American creativity, not merely because they were the forerunner of later drive-ins and drive-throughs, but because of their impact on our culture: they changed our relationship to the automobile, changed the way people experienced movies, and changed movie-going into a family activity.

This statement introduces a new idea, and it is the first statement that is arguable to some extent. The new information is that drive-in movies were forerunners of later developments and that they had an impact on our culture.

4. Investigate

While drive-in facilities such as those at fast-food establishments, banks, pharmacies, and dry cleaners symbolize America's economic ingenuity, they also have affected our personal standards.

Notice that this sentence is different in structure from the one you started with ("Drive-ins represent Americans' creativity and business ingenuity"). The "factual" information in the earlier statement has been incorporated into a dependent clause ("While drive-ins . . . ingenuity"). The contestable part of your idea then appears in the independent clause ("they also have affected our personal standards"). In other words, you are no longer focusing on a claim that most people would agree with; instead you are using the obvious as a point of departure for an idea you will need to "prove."

5. Refine

While drive-in facilities such as those at fast-food restaurants, banks, pharmacies, and dry cleaners symbolize (1) Americans' business ingenuity, they also have contributed (2) to an increasing homogenization of our culture, (3) a willingness to depersonalize relationships with others, and (4) a tendency to sacrifice quality for convenience.

This statement is now specific and fulfills all parts of the assignment. This version, like any good thesis, is not self-evident; its points, 1-4, will have to be proven with evidence in the body of the paper. The numbers in this statement indicate the order in which the points will be presented. Depending on the length of the paper, there could be one paragraph for each numbered item or there could be blocks of paragraph for even pages for each one.