

Preparing a Thesis Statement

2/14/13

Your one-page thesis statement should have five parts as follows:

1. Title: Create a title that allows readers to understand the main issues in your thesis without reading beyond the title.
2. Problem Statement: Identify the problem your thesis will address. Problems can be quite varied but make sure the problem you identify can be addressed through architecture. Generally architecture problems fall into these categories.
 - Social/user group
 - Technology/craft/materials
 - Urban design
 - Sustainability
 - Typology
 - History/theory
3. Thesis Statement: Articulate the position or point of view you will take on the problem. Your position can be (a) analytical, (b) expository, or (c) argumentative. It can be expressed as a statement, a question, or a series of questions. For example, if the problem falls into the urban design category and in particular is about the need for architects to convince residents who are resistant to change to accept higher density living the thesis statement could be:
 - analytical: This thesis will investigate the planning and design strategies that forward-looking architects can use to help residents of a low-density neighborhood accept higher densities (evaluates the problem).
 - expository: This thesis will demonstrate the ecological, social, and economic benefits of high-density living (explains the problem).
 - argumentative: Cities should require developers of high density projects in residential neighborhood to contribute to a fund to improve pedestrian amenities in a nine-block surrounding area in order to mitigate the negative affect of these projects (makes a controversial claim).
4. Project: Say what will be the means through which you will investigate the thesis. For example, a mixed use mid-rise building, or a neighborhood plan with design guidelines and policy proposals. Also, say where you will investigate this thesis. If you do not know the exact site at this time, characterize it. For example, a low-density neighborhood in Seattle near a proposed light rail station.
5. Methods: Describe your approach to finding a solution to the problem, which can also be quite varied. Most architecture theses are qualitative (i.e., not supported by numerical analysis) although a quantitative thesis is quite possible (for example, one that would incorporate a cost-benefit analysis). Most architecture theses are demonstration projects that create new spaces or places that show how the thesis would be achieved—though you can not do this empirically as would occur in the social or physical sciences, given that yours will be a proposal and not an actual inhabitable space or place. Rather your project should have a convincing logic or story

line. To achieve your thesis, you might take a more idealistic or a more realistic approach. You might utilize special design strategies such as computer simulation or morphological analysis. And so forth.

Some Advice

- Begin with what you already know and are passionate about.
- Consider how your thesis will help you get to the next stage of your professional career.
- Remember that no thesis is entirely original. Because you will need to build upon the work of others, make sure that others have explored your proposed line of inquiry.
- Avoid social engineering and architectural determinism (i.e., thinking your design will bring about a change in human behavior).
- Write in an academic but accessible, straight-forward style.