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## Thesis Statement Strategies – Backwards Construction

### What is a thesis statement?

The thesis statement is the guiding statement or argument of a paper and its accompanying supporting details or reasons. The thesis statement guides both the structure of the paper and the reader's expectations.

Sometimes, in the process of writing a paper, your ideas end up changing and the content of your body paragraphs ends up not matching the content of your thesis. One way to correct this is to *backwards construct* the thesis by re-writing it to match the content of your paper. This strategy can also be employed if you write your body paragraphs first.

### How to backwards construct:

*Example:* A student is writing an essay about cooking. In his first body paragraph, he writes about how cooking is inexpensive compared to eating at restaurants, including details about how a dish that could feed someone for a few days could cost less than \$5 to make. In his second body paragraph, he writes about how it is easy to keep track of nutrients when cooking, mentioning that almost all purchased ingredients include nutrition facts. In his third paragraph, he writes about how cooking often becomes a fun hobby for people who actively want to learn it, adding that some people can turn it into a career.

*Step 1: Identify statement or argument the paper is making.*

This student's paper is about benefits of cooking, so a possible argument that the paper is making is "Cooking is a worthwhile skill to learn." Now we have the statement or argument part of the thesis statement.

*Step 2: Examine and summarize your body paragraphs to determine their focus—how they support the statement or argument.*

The above example was a summary of body paragraphs with key details. The first body paragraph was about how cooking is inexpensive; the second body paragraph was about how cooking is healthy; and the third body paragraph was about how cooking can become an enjoyable hobby. Now we have the supporting details or reasons: "cooking is inexpensive, healthy, and can become an enjoyable hobby."

*Step 3: Combine the statement or argument and the supporting details or reasons to make your finished thesis statement.*

From the above examples, this student's thesis statement would be "Cooking is a worthwhile skill to learn because it is inexpensive, healthy, and can become an enjoyable hobby."

**Applying this strategy to conclusions:**

Two of the most important things to do in a conclusion are restating your thesis and summarizing your main points. These can often be done at the same time in a few sentences. In your conclusion, it is important to not simply repeat your thesis statement. You can avoid this by including some key details from your body paragraphs.

For the above example essay, the student might write in his conclusion that "People should learn how to cook in order to enjoy the many benefits of cooking [statement or argument]. One who knows how to cook can make healthy and cheap meals for just a few dollars by paying attention to prices and nutrition labels of ingredients. For those who are especially interested, cooking can also become a passion and even a career [summarized main points with key details]."

Remember! A full conclusion is more than just a restated thesis and summarized main points. So while this will get you started, you still need to leave the reader with final thoughts and perhaps include a call to action or a prediction for the future.