

Topics vs. Themes

DEFINITION	EXAMPLE
A topic is a matter dealt with in a text. Topics describe what a text is about.	"Fear"
A theme is an interpretation of a message conveyed by a text, written in a complete sentence and applicable to multiple texts or classes. Themes explore deeper meanings with universal relevance.	"Facing fear leads to growth."



SCENARIO: Let's say you went to the library and asked the librarian for some book recommendations on the topic of "love." The librarian would probably ask you for more information since this topic is too broad for an effective search. Instead, if you asked for some book recommendations on the theme of "love requires sacrifice", you would receive a much more precise and useful list of options.

REMINDERS:

- A theme must be relevant to multiple texts and classes. Do not include specific references to the text or author under study in your theme.
- A theme must be a complete sentence and must contain a verb. If you just write a word or a phrase (e.g. "Justice" or "The Power of Unity"), you are identifying topics, not themes.
- A theme should be a debatable claim; it should be thought-provoking and not an obvious, easily accepted statement.
 - For example, "~~Our experiences shape who we become~~" is not really a debatable claim. Push it further, be specific, and revise. *How do our experiences shape who we become? Why do our experiences shape who we become? What types of experiences? Positive? Negative?* A stronger theme would be: *"A life of only positive experiences is unfulfilling."*
- Lastly, beware clichés! Yes, "Don't judge a book by its cover" is a theme but it's also an overused cliché! Instead, explore the concept in your own voice with some fresh and specific word choices.

TOPICS	THEMES
Oppression	In order for oppression to occur, members of an oppressed group must be turned against each other.
Rebellion	Rebellion is a result of being discontent.
Adolescence	Adolescence cannot happen without independence.

How do you know your theme is on the right track? Ask yourself, could I write an interesting essay about this? If the answer is yes, then you are probably in good shape!