**Developing a Thesis Statement**

The thesis is the main point and controlling/unifying idea of your essay. The thesis is the most crucial single element of the essay, so you must formulate it with great care.

The thesis, which is your position or opinion on a given subject, serves tow functions:

1. To control and focus content—to tell readers exactly what the essay will discuss.
2. To determine the structure of the argument—to predict the form of the discussion (comparison/contrast, casual, analysis, classification, etc.

Thus one can view the thesis in terms of two “promises” it makes:

1. That the paper will discuss everything proposed in the thesis and nothing else.
2. That the body of the essay will match the structure promised in the thesis.

Bear these points in mind about the thesis:

1. The thesis is argumentative—it states a view that must be developed and proven in the body of the paper. In other words, the purpose of your essay is to persuade the reader of the validity of your thesis.
2. The thesis must be limited and specific.
   1. Your assertion must pertain to a subject that has been narrowed to fit the limits of your essay. Assert one idea only.
   2. Express your opinion directly and precisely. Use specific language. The following are examples of poor thesis:
      * *The capital punishment question is difficult to resolve.* This thesis is poor because the writer has not directly stated his/her opinion on the issue.
      * *The Equal Rights Amendment will be good for our country.*  The term “good” tells us nothing specific. How will it be good? Good for whom?
      * *The Irish have contributed greatly to American culture.* This subject is much too vast for an essay; it must be narrowed to manageable limits.
      * *Drinking is not harmful for teenagers, and laws prohibiting drinking for those under 21 are unfair.* This thesis presents two different ideas, each of which requires its own method of development and kind of evidence. The writer should select one idea and discard the other.

Remember that

* A thesis is not a title. Titles such as “The Decline of the New York Yankees” or “The Fad of Divorce” can suggest a writer’s intended thesis, but the title is not a thesis in itself. The thesis is a position stated in the form of a sentence.
* A thesis is not an announcement of the subject. “My intention is to discuss poverty in Chicago” indicates a subject of discussion but takes no position on the subject.
* A thesis is not a statement of fact. “President Washington’s first name was George” is not a position or opinion requiring support. A thesis makes a judgment of some sort, one that requires development and supporting evidence.