Thesis Statements

Every essay or research paper requires a thesis statement, which establishes the overall point of the paper. The thesis fulfills two main objectives: it states the topic and conveys what the writer will prove about the topic. The thesis is basically an answer to a question that has been asked about the topic – the more compelling the question, the more interesting the thesis. Brainstorm. Ask questions about the topic. Sift through many possible ways the topic could be examined. Start with simple questions, and then probe more deeply into the complexities of the topic until a decision is made on a narrowed focus.

The Turn-Around Method of developing a focused thesis statement poses questions about the topic, and then turns the information around to form a sentence. Here's an example beginning with a broad open-ended topic – birds.

- Start by asking simple brainstorming questions.
- What color is a cardinal? ⇿ **A cardinal is** red.
- What foods do *birds of northeastern America* eat? ⇿ **Birds of northeastern America** eat seeds, berries, and insects.

A good paper, however, needs somewhere to go – it needs to have supporting points that can be explored through careful analysis and research that is supported with examples, facts, and specific details. Therefore, asking more complicated questions can result in a more interesting thesis. The more focused the question, the more focused the answer will be as well. The writer should then have a precise purpose and direction for the essay, which includes several options to examine at length in support of the thesis. For Example:

- **How is the American cardinal able to stay in northern regions in the winter?** ⇿ The **American cardinal is able to stay in northern regions in the winter** due to several adaptive measures that ensure its warm body temperature.
  o Shivering
  o Fluffed feathers
  o Adjustment of metabolic rate

- The wide range of possibilities within the simple topic "birds" has been narrowed down to a very specific aspect of the creature's biological adaptive mechanisms. **Getting to this point takes time and mental effort.** The paper, directed by the decision of the writer to choose a narrowed focus, finally makes a statement in answer to a complex question raised during brainstorming.

**Thesis Tip:** In the thesis example above notice the repetition of words. Use **key words from the instructor’s prompt** or question in the thesis statement and in the topic sentences that follow. Repeating key words or variations of the words throughout the essay will help keep it unified around the central idea.
Identify Topic: ________________________________

Move from broad ideas to a specific idea.

Brainstorm five possibilities by which the topic could be examined.

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As the writer, which one possibility is of particular interest?

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Why? What ideas do you have about this aspect of the topic?
What would you like to know more about?

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After generating some good ideas, make another decision. Select one aspect. Pose hypothetical questions about that one aspect?

What factors determine.......?
What would happen if.....?
When are .................?
How do .................?
Why are ............?

A well developed thesis statement is required for research papers, literary analysis, as well as informative and argumentation assignments, regardless of length. The thesis, firmly established in the introduction, guides the direction and specific focus of the research, analysis, or argument. All supporting facts, examples, and details within the paper will point back as appropriate evidence to prove the thesis idea.

An effective essay, based on the five paragraph format, includes an introduction, three supporting body paragraphs, and a conclusion. The success of the essay will depend on determining at least three major factors, reasons, literary devices, elements, effects, causes, etc. and appropriate supporting details that stay unified on proving the answer to one of these complex questions.

Thesis: ____________________________________________
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