Developing the Thesis Statement

The **thesis statement** is the central argument or claim that a writer explores and defends in his or her paper.

A thesis must:
- make a focused claim that is debatable
- take a risk by saying something unique or even strange
- make an argument based on evidence (including contradictory evidence)
- govern the entire paper

A thesis is NOT:
- A topic. A thesis makes an argument *about* the topic.
- A purpose statement. A purpose statement lacks argument and merely shows the organization of a paper.

Making a Focused Claim

Most claims fall under one (or more) of the following categories:
- **Resemblance** - Highlights the similarities/differences between two texts/elements and proves the significance of these similarities/differences.
- **Evaluation** - Builds off the idea of comparison, but makes a judgment as to which element or text is better.
- **Definition** - Argues the meaning of an abstract idea or subject.
- **Causal** - Suggests that one element affects another, or points to the cause of an outcome.
- **Proposal** - Argues whether an action or solution should or should not be implemented.

To make sure your thesis is an argument, make sure the answers to the following questions are all *Yes!*

1. Do I have evidence to support what I’m saying?
2. Does the evidence come from the text or other academic sources?
3. Could others argue against what I’m saying?
4. Would they have evidence to support their claims?

Taking a Risk

Your reader does not want to read an argument that has been made a thousand times. When developing a claim, try to **explore an aspect of the issue or text that interests you.** Make connections between ideas that others might not see, or draw conclusions that seem counter-intuitive. The more unique the better—just make sure you can support your arguments with evidence.

Using Evidence

The difference between an argument and an opinion is that an argument can be proved using support from outside sources. As you develop your thesis, begin to develop smaller claims that help prove your thesis, and make sure you can find somewhere in a text or texts that supports these claims. Your paper will use these pieces of evidence to show the strength of your argument.

You should also **consider evidence that goes against your claim.** If you can prove those who disagree with you wrong, you further strengthen your own argument. If you use this evidence to qualify your argument, you prove to your reader that you are realistic in your approach, lending your argument more credibility.

Governing the Paper

These smaller claims and the evidence to support them will become your body paragraphs. **Each body paragraph must relate to and supports your thesis, and your thesis must express all the claims in your paragraphs.** This is no easy task! Ensuring this relationship requires constant revision throughout the writing process, both of your paper and of your thesis statement. **You will not have a perfect thesis statement until the rest of your paper has been written.**