Developing a Thesis Statement

A thesis is a short statement that suggests an argument or your perspective on your paper’s focus. A thesis should also be significant or interesting and be manageable for the assignment or the paper you are writing. Your thesis should reflect your specific contribution to your reader’s understanding of the topic at hand. It should also contain a claim about the topic that you can explain and justify.

However, a thesis can have different purposes dependent on both the topic and discipline at hand. It may be used to categorize or define, persuade or convince, demonstrate cause-effect or correlation, reveal a resemblance or parallel between cases, evaluate or critically examine, propose or create new policies, and address ethical issues.

There are several ways to create a thesis:

- Generate a list of questions about the topic. Pick the question that interests you most and answer it.

- Look at aspects of the topic that you do not fully understand and examine the causes of the difficulty or confusion.

- Free-write. Write down random thoughts on the topic as they come into your head until you come up with an interesting avenue of investigation.

- Try to move from the general to the specific. The more specific the thesis, the better.

Examples of moving from a topic to a thesis:

**Topic:** The novel, *Heart of Darkness.*

**Vague Generalization:** Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* describes the beginnings of European commerce in Africa.

**Question:** What does the novel suggest about the relations between Europe and Africa?

**General Concept:** The novel represents a symbolic journey that reveals how Europeans imagined a civilizing mission to Africa, but actually savagely exploited the Africans.

**Specific Thesis:** The narrator’s account of the self-restraint exercised by the cannibals reveals that ultimately the most seemingly savage of Africans are more moral than the supposedly civilized Europeans.
**Topic:** The environment

_Vague Generalization:_ The use of gasoline pollutes the air.

**Question:** What alternatives are available to the use of gasoline?

_General Concept:_ The development of solar-powered or electric engines would reduce the use of gasoline and improve air quality.

_Specific Thesis:_ The vast amounts of money used to protect American sources of oil in the Middle East should be used instead to develop the technology necessary to replace gas-powered vehicles.