

Third Stage

Fourth Lecture

Thesis Statement:

A thesis statement is the main idea of your paper, the single all-encompassing assertion that you want your readers to accept after reading your paper. Here are two possible thesis statements: The decision of the Texans to defend the Alamo rather than abandon it was foolhardy. The parochialism of the early modern Olympics caused international bitterness. The thesis statement is the essence of a paper, and everything else in the paper is aimed at supporting it: For a paper with the thesis on the Alamo, the introduction would define the thesis and interest readers in

Choosing a Topic for a Thesis Paper

Now that you know what a good thesis looks like, we can examine the procedure for choosing a topic for a thesis research paper. Although you might settle immediately on the exact thesis statement you'll use in writing your paper, that would be very unusual. More common is this: You pick a topic, narrow it enough to make the scale of research reasonable, and only slowly move toward the final thesis statement as research progresses. Here's the procedure we recommend to start you on your way:

Choose a general topic that interests you (we'll offer some practical tips about that). Do some quick, preliminary reading to learn more about your topic and to see whether enough sources appear to be available. While doing your preliminary reading and throughout your research, develop a "working" thesis statement and continue to refine it.

Still, uncontrolled curiosity has killed many a cat. Choose something that interests you, yes, but also consider **these practical tips:**

Don't choose a topic that's trite. Your instructor probably has read too many papers about abortion laws, gun control, laetrile, or capital punishment. It's possible that you'll say something original and interesting about them, but it's more likely that you won't. The world is full of other topics-choose something that hasn't become stale from too much discussion already.

Don't choose a topic that's too contemporary. What's happening in the news may be fascinating, but you may have difficulty finding enough reliable material. Also, by the time you write your paper, something else may have happened to make it obsolete. For example, you would have had difficulty writing a worthwhile paper about the Watergate break-in a week after it happened. Reliable details were scarce then, and what people thought they knew was changing rapidly.

Don't choose a topic that's too obscure. Obviously you'll be in trouble if you choose a topic for which there are few good sources in your

Don't choose a topic just because you've read an interesting book about it. Books can lead to fine topics, but usually you should avoid those sensationalistic best-sellers that attempt to prove something most people are skeptical about-such as space travelers landing here centuries ago or a piece of ocean in which ships and airplanes are mysteriously devoured. The trouble is that you may not be able to find any sources except that one book you read.