

From Topic to Thesis

A topic is the *general* subject on which you propose to write your paper; a *thesis* is the specific claim you want to elucidate in your essay. There are a few questions you can ask yourself as you develop your thesis that can help ensure you are not just restating obvious facts but are exploring ideas that will engage the reader.

Topic -- this is the general thing you are going to write about and is likely something about which your reader already has a little prior knowledge:

Why is this topic important for you? What initially drew you to this topic? What questions do you have about this topic? (Where did these questions come from)? What is your personal investment in this topic?

Are you making an argument that advocates a certain course of action (or new way of thinking/feeling)? What evidence do you have to support your position? (Remember, you can use outside evidence to extend and complicate your ideas, and to serve as a counter-argument.)

Why should your reader care about this topic and your position? (What are the implications of your claim? Think about larger social or political significance.)

Finally, **the thesis**. Figure out how you will fit all these elements in a sentence or two that will shape and provide a road map for the whole essay:

Sometimes a formula can help you arrive at a working thesis

- Although many people believe _____, closer examination of the evidence/my experience shows _____. Therefore, we must _____ in order to _____.