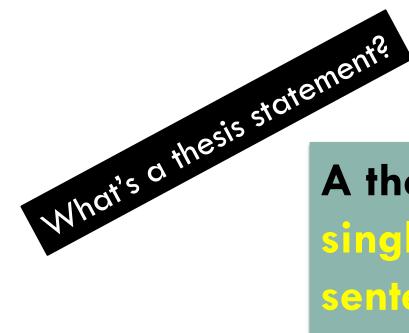


Narrowing and Refining Your Thesis Statement

Quich If an essay is "a short piece of nonfiction that tries to make a point in an interesting way..."

Then the thesis statement is "a statement of the point the essay makes."



A thesis statement is "a single declarative sentence that states what you want your readers to know, believe, or understand after having read your essay."

Thanks to Professor John Tagg for this definition. See end of slide show for source information.

### FINDING YOUR FOCUS

As you gather ideas, your first order of business is to narrow your topic into something manageable in scope and size. Why is it important to narrow your focus?

Think of it this way: the more narrowed your focus, the more interesting (and "digestible") it will be to your reader.



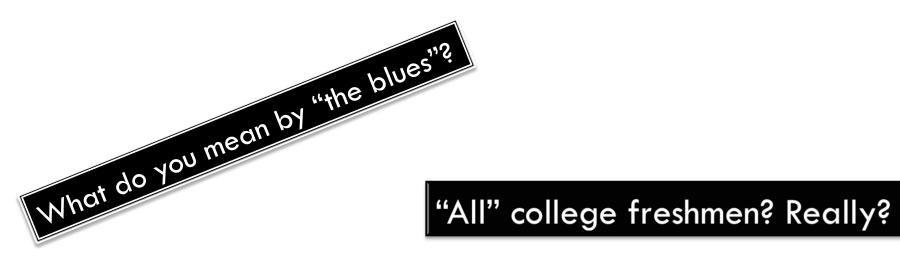
If your topic is too broad, it would be like trying to eat an entire pie...

... in one sitting.

## FOR EXAMPLE

## "College freshmen suffer from the blues and that's why they're dropping out of college."

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS THESIS STATEMENT?



#### Too much to "digest" in a single essay.





#### Why not have a small slice of pie instead?



That's the idea of a narrowed focus. Instead of writing about college freshmen (too broad), write about a specific aspect related to college freshmen:

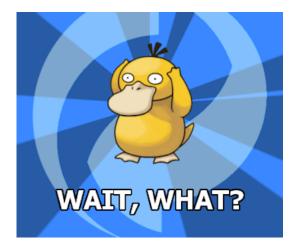
> Freshman Experience Programs

And instead of making a blanket generalization about your subject ("they suffer from the blues"), present a LIMITED BUT CONTENT-RICH FOCUS that will interest and engage your readers.

BY CONTENT-RICH I mean one that passes the "SO WHAT?" test.



Engage your readers with something new, fresh, interesting, challenging. Make them WANT to read your essay.



#### Something like this:

Freshman Experience Programs can help new freshmen adjust to the social and academic challenges of college life. Freshman Experience Programs can help new freshmen adjust to the social and academic challenges of college life.



#### DO THE MATH: CRAFTING YOUR THESIS



thesis

## Crafting Your Thesis



thesis

## **COMMON ERRORS**

DON'T ANNOUNCE "The purpose of this essay is" or, "In this essay, I'm going to argue....")

**DON'T BE TIMID** "I believe...." or, "I think..." Just state your position.

DON'T ALIENATE YOUR READER "People who are against gay marriage are racists!" The objective is to reason with your reader, not offend him.

DON'T MERELY STATE A FACT You can't defend a fact. Facts are used to support your position; they aren't your position.

• DON'T TRY TO COVER TOO MUCH It's better to have a lot to say about a little (slice of pie) than little to say about a lot (the whole pie).

• A QUESTION IS NOT A THESIS STATEMENT Remember, a thesis is a declarative sentence that states what you want your reader to know, believe, or understand, about your topic.



The following slides contain thesis statements that need work. Apply the principles you just learned and revise these into strong, focused, content-rich thesis statements.



#### **STATEMENT OF FACT**

The question of whether we need a national law governing the minimum drinking age is controversial.

#### **POSITION STATEMENT**

INTC

The legal minimum age for purchasing alcohol should be 18 rather than 21 for (the following) reasons.

#### **REVISE A STATEMENT THAT**

#### **GOES WITHOUT SAYING**

Friendship is an important part of life.

#### **A FOCUSED DISCUSSION**

INTO

Cultivating relationships is an important part of remaining socially healthy among college freshmen.

#### **REVISE A STATEMENT THAT'S**

#### INTO ONE THAT'S

#### OF INTEREST TO MOSTLY TO WRITER

#### PROBABLY OF INTEREST TO MANY READERS

The four children in my family have completely different personalities.

Birth order can influence children's personalities in startling ways.

#### **REVISE A THESIS THAT'S**

#### INTO ONE THAT'S

#### GENERALIZED

Living in an apartment for the first time can teach you many things about taking care of yourself.

#### FOCUSED, SPECIFIC

By living in an apartment, first year students can learn valuable lessons in financial planning and time management.

## CAN YOU SUM UP?

#### A Good Thesis

- Is clear
- Asserts one main idea
- Passes the "so what"? test
- Has a limited focus
- Uses specific language
- Is recognizable (the reader "gets it")

#### What to Avoid

- Biting off more than you can chew.
- Goes without saying; of interest only to the writer
- Broad, generalized focus
- Vague, non-specific
- Ambiguity; reader doesn't "get" it.

# PRACTICE

Apply the principles you just learned to your own thesis statement, creating (or revising) as needed to make it strong, clear, focused, and interesting. Work with a partner or peer tutor, as needed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS Some information about thesis statements was excerpted from "The Discovering Ideas Handbook," by John Tagg. You may access this source at

http://daphne.palomar.edu/handbook/handbook.htm#toc

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