What do you already know about thesis statements?

Thesis statements...

Use the ideas that feel most useful to you to make your own checklist for thesis statements:

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Strong Thesis Statements

Read these thesis statements, and use the criteria from the first page to think about why they work well.

1. Through its contrasting river and shore scenes, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* suggests that to find the true expression of American democratic ideals, one must leave "civilized" society and go back to nature.

2. *King Lear*, *The Book of Romans*, and *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* each view the soul as the center of human personality.


4. Through Paul’s experience behind the lines, at a Russian prisoner of war camp, and especially under bombardment in the trenches, Erich Maria Remarque realistically shows how war dehumanizes a man.

5. The use of “whiteness” in *Moby-Dick* illustrates the uncertainty about the meaning of life that Ishmael expresses throughout the novel.

7. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Pearl may appear to be a living embodiment of Hester’s sin, but her ultimate fate suggests that she is an embodiment of true love, and that her flaws are caused only by her father’s refusal to claim her.

8. In "Sonny's Blues," Baldwin uses four female characters, three of whom are mothers and one of whom is an artist, to establish his theme that there's no way to avoid suffering in life.

9. Through two perspectives, male and female, Rodney Jones’ poem “Doing Laundry” and Kate Daniels’ poem “Prayer to the Muse of Ordinary Life” seek to reverse traditional gender roles through opportunity and obligation.

I notice... (Words? Patterns?)

I wonder...
Some helpful patterns and structures for thesis statements

◆◆◆ Can you find these patterns, structures, and words in the Strong Thesis Statements? ◆◆◆

1. As an exploration of the work’s theme or subtheme.

Example: The young man in James Dickey’s poem “The Celebration” develops a mature idea of sexuality by watching his parents in a different setting.

Example: James Dickey’s poem “The Celebration” makes life seem inclusive rather than broken into good and evil, young and old, security and risk.

2. As an analysis of an artistic technique such as imagery, symbolism, or narrative point of view in the work.

Example: At the end of James Dickey’s “The Celebration,” images of lights and circles become symbols of the young narrator’s expanded vision of life.

Example: The descriptions in the two opening stanzas of James Dickey’s “The Celebration” suggest the young narrator’s adolescent notions about sexuality.

Example: The narrator’s description of his parents in this poem reveals much about the emotional maturity of this young man.

3. One typical sentence structure:

[Name of text/author, optional] + Subject of your essay/the sign + verb + argument about the sign/So what?

Example: The dead squirrels signify the fragile mental state of the soldiers and the nonsensical nature of the Civil War

Example: When Dorothy kills the Wicked Witch of the West, Dorothy reveals her own evilness.

Example: In Euripides’ Medea, Medea’s ruthless attitude and merciless actions to take revenge on Jason strongly reinforce women’s roles in Euripides’ 4th century BCE society.

4. Some oft-used words and phrases:

Verbs: define, strengthen, illustrate, develop, suggest, establish, reveal, signify, reinforce, use x to (verb) y

Terms: theme, subtheme, character, setting, foreshadowing, symbolism, plot, point of view, unifying device
Some words/tactics that won’t work well in academic writing:

Read these thesis statements, and use the criteria above to think about why they don’t work well.

1. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester Prynne struggles to understand her daughter Pearl’s strange behavior.

2. In "Sonny's Blues," James Baldwin writes about two brothers attempting to repair their relationship.

3. Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* is a great American novel.

4. Vonnegut criticized the government in many ways.

5. Marriage is love’s tangible walls, they are defined and stable throughout time, love is the unseen passion burning between hearts that have no shields, through intense love you find the home of two hearts.

6. Tim O’Brien shows how things are and questions them. I will find those things and analyze what I think his viewpoint is in situations where he does not say.

7. The literary devices are the main focuses of the poem.

8. Throughout the poem “Habitation,” there are many literary devices such as tone, structure, and imagery that help the reader capture the main idea of this poem.

9. In Euripedes’ *Medea*, it’s hard for the audience to decide if they should or should not sympathize with Medea.

10. Jim becomes aggressive, just like all men are inherently violent.
Find the thesis statements!

(1) Throughout traditional American society, the father has almost always been seen as the head of the household. Only in more recent decades have more varied family structures become common. The lives of Sylvia Plath and Sharon Olds are both reflective of the father-dominated family, and they represent this notion in their poetry. In “The Colossus” Plath writes about her internal struggle with her father’s death. In life, Plath’s father was rarely involved in the lives of his children. This longing for the unrequited love of her father resulted in a personal quest to build the relationship they never had, represented in the poem by the protagonist’s efforts to rebuild the fallen Colossus of Rhodes. In “Saturn” Olds deals with her own issues with her father—mirroring his alcoholism and its effect on his family to the mythical tale of the Roman god Saturn devouring his sons. Both poems make allusions to mythical deities as a metaphor for the dominance of a father over the family. The protagonist’s obsession in “The Colossus” with restoring the great fallen statue of Helios and Olds’ comparison of alcoholism to the myth of Saturn both represent that a father’s actions—in life and in death—have a lasting psychological effect on his children.

(2) Translations are strange birds. Often, because the original language of any given text can contain enigmatic words or phrases that cannot be translated into the translator’s language coherently, the translator will depart from a strict reading of the text in favor of diction, phrasing, and structure that makes more sense in the new language. Because such conjecture becomes a part of the process of translating, the translator’s own understanding of the text’s content and context nearly always enters the equation, creating inconsistencies among different translations of the same text. Translations of Homer’s Iliad are exemplary of these inconsistencies.

(3) Welcome to a world where murder is overlooked, innocent humans are publicly jailed and beaten, and humanity is coming to a definite end by way of infertility and war. The envisioned world takes place in 2027, in Alfonso Cuarón’s film Children of Men (2006). One particular scene, entitled “The Court of the Crimson King,” exemplifies a major premise of the film. The scene opens with a view of the castle-like structure that leads to the entrance of the “Ark of Arts.” Theo, the anti-hero, enters to visit his cousin who lives in a massive government-controlled vault of classic art. Nigel, his slightly unkempt cousin, greets Theo in front of Michelangelo’s David, which is housed on the top story of the incredibly secure government high-rise. The pair sit for lunch at a long dining table adjacent to Picasso’s Guernica. In mid conversation, Nigel shouts at his son, who is sitting at the end of the table, urging him to take his pills, which is a noteworthy trend seen
throughout the film. As the conversation ends, Theo walks to the great window overlooking the city of London and asks his cousin, “A hundred years from now, there won’t be one sad [person] to look at any of this. What keeps you going?” Nigel’s reply encompasses the film’s theme in one short statement, “You know what it is, Theo? I just don’t think about it.” Using popular culture references, *Children of Men* is a political protest which challenges the unnoticed rise of ego-centric passivity in postmodern society and further predicts that the consequences will be a complete disregard for human rights.

(4) Flowers are more than just pretty blooms meant to be admired. Their purpose is more significant than to be cut and placed in a vase where they will wither and die. John S. Adams said, “Flowers are the alphabet of angels, whereby They write on hills and fields mysterious truths.” (qtd. in Loy 4). Flowers have been used to express feelings and reveal hidden meanings. According to Susan Loy, author of *Flowers, the Angels' Alphabet – Language and Poetry of Flowers*, the language of flowers is a literary tradition. Assigning sentiments to different flowers became popular in the Victorian Era and is based on a combination of folklore, literature, religion, and physical characteristics of the plant (5). With this in mind, it is only natural to regard flowers within literature to have symbolic meaning. Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* is the perfect novel in which to look for such symbolism regarding flowers. After all, flowers are necessary to a butterfly’s role. In this story, Alvarez brings to life the historical heroines that helped start the revolution that would free the Dominican Republic from their tyrannical dictator, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo. The Mirabal sisters became known as ‘las mariposas’ or ‘the butterflies’. This is a story of their life, their struggle, and of the surviving sister coming to terms with her own identity. In order to compare the Mirabal sisters to butterflies, the flowers that are vital to a butterflies’ existence must be considered. Just as actual flowers give butterflies’ lives a significant purpose, the flowers found throughout this story are symbolic of the characteristics and values that shape and give purpose to the lives of the Mirabal Sisters.

(5) Writer Gloria Steinem declares in a *Revolution from Within*, “Most writers write to say something about other people—and it doesn’t last. Good writers write to find out about themselves, and it lasts forever” (Steinem). Thus, there is a difference between divulging the writer’s life without any purpose behind it and using his or her emotions and concerns to construct a bond between the reader and the author. In this case, in *Something to Declare*, Julia Alvarez explores her experiences with competing cultural expectations in order to construct a connection between her writing and society.
THESIS STATEMENT PRACTICE
Using the examples from the packet or the examples below as models (replace the underlined parts with what’s relevant to your ideas), write or re-write a thesis for one of your papers. Or, write one about something else: a book, movie, or song you’ve been thinking about lately.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Thesis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

My awesome thesis:

Check your awesome thesis using your checklist from page 1. Is it awesome?

An even better version:
TOPIC SENTENCE WORKSHOP: The Writing Center, October 5, 2011

What do you already know?

Topic sentences...

What do you think will be most helpful to remember when writing your next paper?
**Topic sentences: mini-claims that connect the paragraph to the overall thesis**

You should be able to see how a paper’s thesis is supported by the topic sentences (or topics) of the body paragraphs. Use sample papers in *A Writer’s Resource* to fill in these frames, then see if you can see how the topic sentences are mini-claims that explain why the thesis is correct.

**Essay:**

**Thesis:**

**Topic Sentences:**

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**Essay:**

**Thesis:**

**Topic Sentences:**

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1 Sometimes the topic sentence is at the end; sometimes it is omitted, if it states the obvious (see *A Writer’s Resource*, pg 69-70.)
Essay:

Thesis:

Topic Sentences:

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