Excerpt from: UNC Writing Center’s *Thesis Statements* handout. To view the entire publication go to <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>

When reviewing your first draft and its working thesis, **ask yourself the following:**

* **Do I answer the question?** Re-reading the question prompt after constructing a working thesis can help you fix an argument that misses the focus of the question.
* **Have I taken a position that others might challenge or oppose?**If your thesis simply states facts that no one would, or even could, disagree with, it’s possible that you are simply providing a summary, rather than making an argument.
* **Is my thesis statement specific enough?** Thesis statements that are too vague often do not have a strong argument. If your thesis contains words like “good” or “successful,” see if you could be more specific: *why* is something “good”; *what specifically* makes something “successful”?
* **Does my thesis pass the “So what?” test?** If a reader’s first response is, “So what?” then you need to clarify, to forge a relationship, or to connect to a larger issue.
* **Does my essay support my thesis specifically and without wandering?** If your thesis and the body of your essay do not seem to go together, one of them has to change. It’s okay to change your working thesis to reflect things you have figured out in the course of writing your paper. Remember, always reassess and revise your writing as necessary.
* **Does my thesis pass the “how and why?” test?** If a reader’s first response is “how?” or “why?” your thesis may be too open-ended and lack guidance for the reader. See what you can add to give the reader a better take on your position right from the beginning.

Examples:

 Weak thesis statement:

*The North and South fought the Civil War for many reasons, some of which were the same and some different.*

Improved thesis statement:

*While both sides fought the Civil War over the issue of slavery, the North fought for moral reasons while the South fought to preserve its own institutions.*

Strong thesis statement:

*While both Northerners and Southerners believed they fought against tyranny and oppression, Northerners focused on the oppression of slaves while Southerners defended their own right to self-government.*

Weak thesis statement:

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

Improved thesis statement:

*In Huckleberry Finn, Mark Twain develops a contrast between life on the river and life on the shore.*

Strong thesis statement:

*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.*