**Academic Center for Excellence’s**

**Tips for Strong Thesis Statements**

A ***thesis statement*** is the main idea of an entire essay. It should relate directly to the prompt and illuminate the purpose for writing. A thesis should encompass all the points made in the body of a paper. The points that will be covered may be listed, which is why a thesis statement is sometimes referred to as the roadmap of an essay. Until the essay is ready for publication or submission, the thesis statement should be a ***working thesis***, meaning it should grow and change with the essay to ensure it remains the epitome of the overarching point.

**Guidelines**

1. Have something worthwhile to say. A thesis is an attitude toward a topic which leads to a discussion. It should not be a fact.
2. Use specific terms. Speak directly and with conviction. Avoid opinionated expressions (i.e. I think that, in my opinion, etc.)
3. Position the thesis as the last statement in the introduction unless otherwise instructed. Beginning with background information before stating the point is more persuasive.

**Examples**

Weak

This paper will tell you about my neighborhood, where I’ve lived for ten years, and why I like it.

Let me inform you about a book I read that was very interesting.

I think capital punishment is a question with many sides to it.

Strong

My neighborhood was a good place to grow up because of the tree-lined streets, the easily available public transportation, and the interesting people who lived there.

The *Exorcist* is very exciting because of the character development and the frightening plot.

Capital punishment is wrong; criminals should be rehabilitated, not killed; the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime, and no one has the right to take another’s life.

The thesis sentences in the left column are weak for two reasons: they waste words and are vague. Phrases like “this paper will tell you about” and “let me inform you about” may be fine to get started but should not be used in the final draft. “I think” weakens the credibility and can be removed.

The first sentence on the weak side starts indirectly, has information that would be better in the introduction or in a later paragraph, and does not tell the reader why the writer likes the neighborhood. The revised thesis statement begins directly and lists three specific reasons why the writer likes it. These are the three main points (s)he will make in the essay, in the same order. The second sentence is much better after revision: it wastes no words, and it tells precisely what book the writer will discuss and why it was interesting. The third sentence is far too vague. Saying that a question has many sides to it says nothing; a thesis must be arguable. State which side is going to be considered and what the exact points are.