Terminology

♦ Subject area
  o A large category where your topic is located
    ▪ Ex. Subject = Civil liberties

♦ Topic
  o The definitive issue the paper deals with
    ▪ Ex. Topic = 1960’s Civil Rights Movement

♦ Thesis
  o An assertion of the topic
    ▪ Ex. Without Martin Luther King Jr., the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s would have been unsuccessful.

Subject to Topic

♦ Avoid broad topics
  o Subject = Women, Topic = Women in history
    ▪ Topic too large for specific thesis statement

♦ Avoid topics that are not arguable
  o Subject = Toni Morrison, Topic = Biography

♦ Avoid topics that are too complex for your background
  o Subject = Linguistics, Topic = OE Northumbrian dialects

Side Note About Topics

♦ Most students find they lack paper/word length because they have failed to focus their research
♦ Most students find it easy to become the “expert” when they narrow a topic so it is manageable
♦ To narrow your topic, see the Pre-writing Strategies information on the CTL web page (www.uis.edu/ctl)

Subject versus Topic

Subject                          Topic
1. Agricultural Production      1. The effect of mechanization on farm employment.

What is a thesis statement?

♦ It is the central message of the essay
♦ It’s the essay’s main idea
♦ States the essay’s topic
♦ It prepares the readers
♦ States the essay’s purpose
♦ Indicates the focus

A good thesis statement includes:

♦ Subject that two people would disagree
♦ Corresponds clearly with the assignment
♦ Expresses one main idea
♦ Asserts your conclusions about the subject

Formulating a thesis statement:

♦ Step 1: What do you notice?
♦ Step 2: What 3 details are the most interesting?
♦ Step 3: Why are they the 3 most interesting details?

Having Trouble?

♦ Turn your topic into a question (or multiple questions).
♦ The answer to the question is the thesis statement for the essay.
  ▪ Ex. Q: “What are the potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class?”
A: “The potential benefits of using computers in a fourth-grade class are . . . .”

OR

A: “Using computers in a fourth-grade class promises to improve . . . “

Test Your Question

- Determine as many questions as possible
  - No question is too broad or narrow in the early stages
- Treat each question as a “possibility”
- Test each question with these others:
  - Is the question or answer plausible enough to be made convincing?
  - Is the question sufficiently challenging?
  - Is the question within your reach, given the limitations on time, your access to pertinent information, and the length of the assignment?
- Do not forget Who, What, When, Where, and Why if you are stuck

An example: Start to Finish Subject and Topics

- **Subject:** College Education
- **Topics:** upward mobility, first-generation, consumerism, price of books, tuition costs, overall college costs, availability of financial aid, technology, preparedness
  - Choose preparedness
- **An example: Questions and Answers**
- **Does high school adequately prepare students for college?**
  - Answer: No, high school does not adequately prepare students for college.
- **What do students need to be prepared for college?**
  - Answer: High school students need to be made aware of the demands required to receive a college education.
- **What consequences result from underprepared students?**
  - Answer: Underprepared college students usually do not succeed in college, some even fail out.
- **Thesis statements:**
  - High schools fail to prepare students for entrance into college, therefore, colleges should offer more remedial courses.
  - The lack of prepared freshman entering American universities indicates a need for high school teachers and counselors to reiterate the rigors of college curricula.
  - High schools fail to prepare students for entrance into college, therefore, many students fail to finish.
- **All together now...**
  - Q: Does high school adequately prepare students for college?
  - A: No, high school does not adequately prepare students for college.
  - T: High schools fail to prepare students for entrance into college, therefore, colleges should offer more remedial courses.
  - Q: What do students need to be prepared for college?
  - A: High school students need to be made aware of the demands required to receive a college education.
  - T: The lack of prepared freshman entering American universities indicates a need for high school teachers and counselors to reiterate the rigors of college curricula.
  - Q: What consequences result from underprepared students?
  - A: Underprepared college students usually do not succeed in college, some even fail out.
  - T: High schools fail to prepare students for entrance into college, therefore, many students fail to finish.

- **A strong thesis takes some sort of stand.**
  - Ex. Because Banana Herb Tea Supplement promotes rapid weight loss that results in the loss of muscle and lean body mass, it poses a potential danger to customers.
- **A strong thesis justifies discussion.**
  - Ex. While most American families would view extended family as a burden, African American families rely on extended family for support.
- **A strong thesis expresses one main idea.**
  - Ex. Because the Internet is filled with tremendous marketing potential, companies should exploit this potential by using web pages that offer both advertising and customer support.
- **A strong thesis is specific.**
  - Ex. Hunger persists in Appalachia because jobs are scarce and farming in the infertile soil is rarely profitable.