Thesis Secrets

Thesis Secret #1
A strong thesis statement is the vector of your argument. It expresses the direction and magnitude of your position.

- It clearly states your position.
- It addresses the writing task.
- It is interesting.

Examples:

--John Irvine’s introduction to the Bantam Classic edition of Great Expectations offers a fresh, concrete perspective that may only arise when one popular novelist examines another.
--Irving presents a readable critique that is, however, ultimately unsatisfying for its lack of character analysis.
--Even though his analysis neglects the pervasive sexism of the text, Irving’s introduction is worthwhile in its examination of class issues.

Thesis Secret #2
A thesis does not have to be in the first paragraph—it might be in the last. All paragraphs before the thesis must show clear progression toward the thesis; all paragraphs after the thesis must show clear elaboration or support of the thesis.

Thesis Secret #3
Many of us don’t know what to write about until we start writing. No thesis is written in stone until the final draft. Begin with a very sketchy form of a thesis and throw it out if you think of a better one. Don’t waste time waiting for the Perfect Thesis Fairy. She’ll never come! Just think of a plain old thesis NOW and revise later, if necessary.

Thesis Pitfalls

Thesis Pitfall #1: Shopping List Theses
Don’t rattle off a list of unconnected thoughts and expect to weld them mechanically into a strong argumentative thesis—a strategy that a lot of people use when they write the old high school style 5-paragraph essay. A strong thesis will cover all of your points once and will suggest relationships between these points.

Examples:

--I disagree with John Irving’s assessment of Great Expectations because he is disorganized, unfair, and inaccurate.
--Irving’s introduction was successful because he examined character motivation, addressed issues of style, and explored Dickens’ plotting devices.
**Thesis Pitfall #2: “I’m not as dumb as you think I am”—Painfully, Painfully Obvious Theses**

A strong thesis is one that could be challenged by a sane person who is at least as smart as you. A thesis is not a simple statement of fact, something that everyone knows. Confronted with a painfully, painfully obvious thesis, a reader is likely to ask “so what?”

Examples:

*Great Expectations*, written by Charles Dickens, is widely read. Because Dickens lived over one hundred years ago, it is hard to imagine his world.

**Thesis Pitfall #3: Super-General, Super-Vague ICKY Language Theses**

The following words and phrases can be dangerous in theses and anywhere else in your essay. Use at your own risk.

**Huge Historical Sweep**: throughout time, throughout history, age-old, since the dawn of time, since Adam and Eve, since our country was founded

**Huge Population Sweep**: humanity, mankind, society, America, culture, throughout the country, throughout the world, all over the world

**The Scary Present Day**: today’s world, today’s society, modern world, fast-paced, industrialized

**Wishy-Washy Badness**: bad, crisis, problem, epidemic, scourge, plague

**Wishy-Washy Goodness**: important, nice, interesting, good

**Just Plain Wishy-Washy**: kind of, sort of, basically, practically, in a way, pretty much things, stuff, factors

**At-Least-To-Me Humility**: in my opinion, it seems to me, at least to me, it can be said

**Ghost-Like Authorities**: experts contend, people think, scientists agree, authorities believe; (and with Passive Voice) it can be seen, it has been noted, it is often said

**Essayisms**: Webster’s defines…, firstly/secondly/thirdly, in conclusion, there is, there are