What is a thesis?

- A **thesis statement**, which develops into the **theory** or **argument** of a paper is:
  - a statement of the **main idea** of the essay. It tells the reader what the essay is about and what point the writer is trying to prove or argue;
  - a way to establish a controlling idea that gives an essay organizational focus;
  - usually one to three sentences long; and
  - generally appears at the **end of the first paragraph** (introduction).

What should a theory for W130 or W131 be?

- A theory is your own discovery—your interpretation—that comes out of synthesizing other authors’ ideas as well as your own life experiences in relation to a particular issue, question, or debate. Because it does not lead to one pre-set conclusion, it has the power to both evolve and change over the course of your essay. The thesis acts as a powerful tool to discover, learn, and develop a thought or idea through the ideas and examples from your sources. Thus, a theory for these composition classes should:
  - be more than a summary or restatement of the authors’ ideas;
  - go beyond comparing and contrasting the authors’ viewpoints;
  - say something more than whether you/the authors agree or disagree with each other; and
  - take a stand on an issue about which reasonable people could disagree.

Why does your essay need a thesis?

- Having a thesis statement gives you a way to:
  - organize your essay around a central issue;
  - provide your essay momentum; and
  - focus on a goal as you write your essay; help you decide what material to include (which quotes and examples) and what to leave out.

**Common Mistakes in Creating a Thesis/Theory Statement**

- The thesis is not simply a question or a statement of fact; it must make a claim about what the paper will actually accomplish.
- The thesis must go beyond a summary of the authors’ points; this is your paper.
- The thesis should not be incredibly broad or extremely narrow; use your sources to go beyond common-sense declaration with which no rational person could argue (too broad) but also push your sources to show the implications of an issue beyond the specific claims of your quoted authors (too narrow).

**Best Tip for Making Your Thesis Grow and Evolve**

Test each new example or fresh piece of evidence (there should be at least one per paragraph) against the claims made in your thesis statement. What has that fresh evidence added to your original thesis? Have you added a more specific key term that you could build into your thesis statement, a new level of complexity, or a new way of understanding the issue?