

## A Quick Reference Guide from Writing Support Services

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

### Developing a Thesis

1. Once you've read the story or novel closely, look back over your notes for patterns of questions or ideas that interest you. Have most of your questions been about the characters, how they develop or change?

For example:

If you are reading Conrad's The Secret Agent, do you seem to be most interested in what the author has to say about society? Choose a pattern of ideas and express it in the form of a question and an answer such as the following:

Question: What does Conrad seem to be suggesting about early 20th century London society in his novel The Secret Agent?

Answer: Conrad suggests that all classes of society are corrupt.

Pitfalls:

Choosing too many ideas.

Choosing an idea without any support.

2. Once you have some general points to focus on, write your possible ideas and answer them.

For example:

Question: How does Conrad develop the idea that all classes of society are corrupt?

Answer: He uses images of beasts and cannibalism whether he's describing socialites, policemen or secret agents.

3. To write your thesis statement, all you have to do is turn the question and answer around. You've already given the answer, now just put it in a sentence (or a couple of sentences) so that the thesis of your paper is clear.

For example:

In his novel, The Secret Agent, Conrad uses beast and cannibal imagery to describe the characters and their relationships to each other. This pattern of images suggests that Conrad saw corruption in every level of early twentieth century London society.

4. Now that you're familiar with the story or novel and have developed a thesis statement, you're ready to choose the evidence you'll use to support your thesis. There are a lot of good ways to do this, but all of them depend on a strong thesis for their direction.

For example:

Here's a student's thesis about Joseph Conrad's The Secret Agent.

In his novel, The Secret Agent, Conrad uses beast and cannibal imagery to describe the characters and their relationships to each other. This pattern of images suggests that Conrad saw corruption in every level of early twentieth century London society.

This thesis focuses on the idea of social corruption and the device of imagery. To support this thesis, you would need to find images of beasts and cannibalism within the text.