**Topic Sentence and Thesis Statement:**

**The Keystones of Organized Writing**

**Thesis**

A thesis statement is the basic stand that an author takes, the opinion that he expresses, and the major point that he wishes to make about his subject. It contains the controlling idea of the essay, and therefore, gives the direction and the unity to all the separate elements of the writing. The purpose of the essay is to convince the reader that the thesis is indeed a valid one.

1. The first step in writing an effective thesis statement involves the **focusing**, **limiting**, or **narrowing of the topic**. The scope of the thesis will depend on length, purpose, audience, occasion, and knowledge.
2. Each thesis will (a) state the subject clearly and specifically so that it can be broken into parts; (b) take a stand or attitude about the subject; and (c) provide the direction by indicating order in which the essay will develop the points.
3. The controlling idea in the thesis is a word, phrase, or clause that states the opinion, attitude, or stand that the writer takes about the subject; it provides the angle from which the writer wishes to approach his subject.
4. The thesis is always a **single declarative statement**.

**1. A thesis is not a title**

Poor: The Decline of Baseball

**Better**: Baseball, once a national pastime and even an addiction, has lost its popularity because of the new interest in more violent sports.

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Poor: Homes and Schools

**Better**: If parents want better education for their children, they must be willing to commit their time to working with the schools.

**2. A thesis is not an announcement of the subject**

Poor: I want to share some thoughts with you about our space program.

**Better**: Since the space program has yet to provide the American people with any substantial, practical returns, it is a waste of money and should be dissolved.

**3. A thesis is not a statement of absolute fact**

Poor: William Shakespeare wrote King Lear.

**Better**: King Lear exemplifies the finest development of Shakespeare's dramatic talent.

**4. A good thesis is restricted: it limits the subject to manageable**

**amount**

Poor: People are too selfish.

**Better**: Rush hour traffic exemplifies human behavior at its worst.

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Poor: Crime must be stopped.

**Better**: To stop the alarming rise in the number of violent crimes committed every year, American courts must hand out tougher sentences.

**5. A good thesis is unified: it should express one major idea about one**

**subject**

Poor: Detective stories are not a high form of literature, but people have always been fascinated by them and many fine writers have experimented with them.

**Better**: Detective stories appeal to the basic human desire for thrills.

**6. A good thesis is specific**

Poor: The new Denver Art Museum is impressive.

**Better**: The new Denver Art Museum is a monument to human folly.

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Poor: Hemingway's war stories are very good.

**Better**: Hemingway's war stories helped to create a new prose style.