Moving from Topic to Thesis

By now you should know the topic of your research paper and, after the background essay and our consultation, you should have a pretty good idea of your research question. Let’s now start to put this together with our reading from Green and Lidinsky to develop a thesis statement. To start, you should think about the significance of our research question. A good model is the “I am studying” format proposed by Wayne Booth, Gregory Columb, and Joseph Williams in *The Craft of Research*.

1. Topic: I am studying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

2. Question: because I want to find out what/why/how \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_,

3. Significance: in order to help my reader understand \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

# Example:

I am studying public funding for the arts

because I want to find out how accessible the arts are to those people who are members of the “working poor”

in order to help my reader understand whether or not our tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status.

First, start by writing your topic in the worksheet below. Next, think about why you are studying this topic. What is the question that you decided to focus on after your interview, background essay, and consultation?

As Booth, Columb, and Williams state “When you move from step 1 to 2, you stop being a mere data collector, because you are now motivated not by aimless curiosity (by no means a useless impulse), but by a desire to understand something better. That second step also helps you develop an increasingly sophisticated relationship with your readers. When you move from step 2 to 3, you focus your project on the significance of that understanding, at least for yourself. But you can join a community of researchers only when you can see that significance from your readers’ point of view. With that last step, you change your intention from merely discovering and understanding something for yourself to showing and explaining something to others, a move that makes a stronger claim on readers and so creates a stronger relationship with them.”

Moving from step 2 to 3, however, can be challenging. Start by asking “what should we do about this situation/issue/problem?” This is where the rubber hits the road. You need to suggest some kind of change and make a claim. Remember how Green and Lidinsky talk about claims of fact (establish that a problem exists, has existed, or will exist), claims of value (evaluate the problem or condition that exists, has existed, or will exist), and claims of policy (propose a solution for a problem that exists, has existed, or will exist).

Topic: I am studying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Question: because I want to know \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Conceptual significance: so I can help readers \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Potential practical application: so they can \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

# Example:

I am studying public funding for the arts

because I want to know how accessible the arts are to those people who are members of the “working poor”

so I can help readers understand whether or not our tax dollars support cultural enrichment for all citizens regardless of their socio-economic status

so they can make informed policy changes to make the arts accessible to all.

Once we have reached this point, we’re on the verge of creating a thesis statement. Of course, we need to do research to answer these questions. Once we do, we can decide what position we want to take and turn this into a thesis statement.

Think about the four models for a good thesis that Green and Lidinsky propose:

* Correcting misinformation—am I going to challenge a commonly-shared belief?
* Filling the gap—am I going to fill in some gap in research that other researchers have neglected?
* Modifying what other have said—am I going to build upon or revise someone else’s research?
* Hypothesis testing—am I going to provide another explanation for data or facts?

# Potential thesis:

Increased funding of arts programs in low-income neighborhoods not only educates and entertains citizens, it reduces crime, lowers poverty rates, creates jobs, and produces additional tax revenues.

Now you try

Topic: I am studying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Question: because I want to know \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Conceptual significance: so I can help readers \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Potential practical application: so they can \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Now get to work and find sources so you can come up with a thesis statement!