

## Thesis Statements: Digging Deeper

You may have gotten the comment on one of your essays that your thesis statement could go deeper or be more developed. How do you do this? Like all critical thought, the key is in asking questions. Take your tentative thesis and ask how or why, or look for the deeper significance.

*For example:* Schools in this state have been crippled by lack of funding.

This tentative thesis statement has a topic and an opinion. Yet it is a bit broad and it's also rather bland. Many people think lack of funding is hurting schools, so what new idea does the writer have to add to the discussion? The writer needs a more analytical thesis. In order to develop the thesis, the writer needs to begin asking questions: How? Why? What's the significance?

**How?** A "how" question asks about the process by which something happened or about the effects of that process. How does lack of funding cripple schools? Here are two ideas for revised thesis statements.

*Effect:* Lack of funding has made it almost impossible for California schools to meet the needs the state's diverse population.

*Process:* The lack of funding in the state has made it difficult for schools to attract qualified teachers. This has lowered the standard of education provided in the classroom.

**Why?** A "why" question asks about the causes of something. Why have the schools been crippled by lack of funding? It is sometimes hard to sort causes from effects. Something that may look like a cause, such as unqualified teachers, may actually be the effect of some deeper, or *remote*, cause.

*Cause:* Decades of politicians promising "no new taxes" and voters desiring to cut taxes have crippled the state's ability to raise sufficient funds for education. The main reason schools are failing is that we've chosen to abandon them.

**What's the significance?** Here the writer asks why the tentative thesis statement matters. In other words, who cares? One way to answer this question is for the writer to look at why s/he was interested in this thesis in the first place. What grabbed the writer would likely also grab the reader. The other way to answer this question is to look at the larger societal implications. What effect will the tentative thesis have on society? Or what does it say about society that the tentative thesis is true?

*Significance:* Horace Mann believed that public school was "the great equalizer." By giving everyone an equal education, public school could level the playing field by providing people with equal knowledge and skills. By ignoring the funding crisis in public schools, we are saying that we no longer believe in the importance of this function. As schools falter, so do the hopes for class and racial equality.

### **It's all about doing the work.**

The more you know about a topic, the more insight you will have on it. So the more you read and research, the easier it will be for you to go deeper with your thesis statement. You will also become more familiar with the common arguments surrounding the topic and so can more easily enter into the discussion.

All in all, you can't rely on inspiration for a good thesis statement (though that can happen). It's unlikely that a brilliant idea will come to you out of the blue every time you need to write a paper. Most often, you will develop a good thesis statement through the hard work of reading and asking questions.