Thesis Handout

A good thesis is the single most important part of a good paper, and thus you should put a great deal of time into developing yours. In this class, a good thesis has the following qualities:

- It is a claim about the texts—it is, in other words, argumentative.
- It is provable—you can cite so much specific evidence from the text supporting your thesis that you can prove to your reader that your thesis is plausible.
- It is **not** obvious or simplistic—proving a thesis that is really simple and easy to prove is not a challenge, and therefore doesn't make for an impressive paper. Instead, your argument should show the reader something new and interesting about the text(s).
- It makes a point that affects our interpretation of the text—you should be trying to prove something that has some significance for how we interpret the texts, not something so small that it's irrelevant.
- It has unity—your thesis should make one unified point, even if you are writing about two or more texts. Otherwise your paper will sound like several shorter papers taped together. This is particularly difficult if you are working with texts' differences, so be careful.
- It is progressive, and can be broken up into "sub-theses"—you will structure your paper by tackling bits of your thesis one part at a time, so that your argument builds on itself.
- Unless, you're writing a one-paragraph paper, it is **not** one sentence long. The thesis is your reader's "road map" to the paper, so it must be clear and very complete. If you can do that in one sentence, your thesis is probably either too vague or lacking in complexity.

from Alex Block