

## *Using Cause and Effect to Create a Thesis*

### **Writing bird by bird, you accumulate details and become totally lost:**

While writing bird by bird, looking for and recording details is frequently a good way to start writing, at some point the details may become overwhelming; you may start to feel lost in a forest of information. When this happens, you need a thesis.

You can think of a thesis statement as both a claim about your subject and a promise you make to readers about how you approach the subject. The rest of your essay supports the claim and thus delivers on the promise. (Aaron 18)

Okay, you need a thesis that's a claim and a promise. But how do you know when you have a claim that will work and a promise you can keep?

To be effective, a thesis must be a generalization, not a fact; limited in scope, not too broad; and sharply focused, not too vague. (Hacker 15)

For example (modified from Hacker 15):

<b>Too Factual</b>	The polygraph was developed by Dr. John A. Larson in 1921.
<b>Revised</b>	Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, its use by employers should be banned.
<b>Too Broad</b>	Many drugs are now being used successfully to treat mental illnesses.
<b>Revised</b>	Despite its risks and side effects, Prozac is an effective treatment for depression.
<b>Too Vague</b>	Many of the songs played on station KQQQ are disgusting.
<b>Revised</b>	Of the songs played on station KQQQ, all too many depict sex crudely, sanction the beating or rape of women, or foster gang violence.

### **Using Cause and Effect to Create a Thesis:**

The interesting thing about a thesis is that we know a good one when we read it. We sense that it's not just a fact and neither too broad nor too vague and that it contains a promise about what is to follow. But still, creating a thesis seems to be more art than logic. The thesis equation, however, gives you an approach that you can use to state a thesis.

**Thesis = Because + Cause + Effect**

The first thesis above is already in this form.

Because the polygraph has not been proved reliable, its use by employers should be banned.

The other two can be rewritten as well:

Because Prozac is an effective treatment for depression, it is prescribed despite its risks and side effects.

Because of the violent and sexual songs broadcast by station KQQQ, its programming too often depicts crude sex, the beating or rape of women, and gang violence.

While the original in the second two cases may be written better, this cause-effect approach to a thesis can usually work. Once you have the thesis and begin sorting bird by bird, keeping some, discarding others, finding new ones, once you have a solid thesis with which to organize your essay, in other words, you can leaving the rewording of the thesis to subsequent rewrites.

### Works Cited

Aaron, Jane E. *The Little, Brown Handbook: Brief Version*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.