

## A few reminders about finding a workable topic and crafting a good thesis!

You need to come up with a workable (i.e. arguable) topic, which means that you need more than a general description or a vague idea. Starting with the basic categories, your topic will need to:

- IDENTIFY THE BASIC SUBJECT MATTER/MODE
- LIMIT AND NARROW YOUR FOCUS TO A SPECIFIC AND POINTED THEMATIC QUESTION
- INDICATE THAT YOU WILL PURSUE ONE OR MORE SPECIFIC TECHNICAL ISSUES
- OFFER A CLEAR AND PERVASIVE RELATIONSHIP OF THE ABOVE TO THE COURSE THEMES!

**So, while these aren't perfect, here are a couple of examples of how to beat a topic into submission:**

1. *Unarguable topic:* Horror movies  
*Slightly better:* Horror movies using suture as a film technique  
*Slightly better than that:* How [two or three specific horror movies] use suture and punish promiscuity  
*Good topic:* How [two or three specific horror movies] rely on the technique of suture and the voyeuristic expectations of the audience to present a disciplinary commentary on teens' sexual behavior

The good topic includes not only the subject matter (horror as a genre) but also pointed thematic question (conservative/disciplinary presentation of teen sex) and a specific technical issue (techniques used to create suture) that relates to the theme of the course (sexual voyeurism).

2. *Unarguable topic:* The film techniques of Alfred Hitchcock  
*Slightly better:* Hitchcock's aggressive female characters  
*Slightly better than that:* Hitchcock's techniques of filming female aggression  
*Good topic:* How Hitchcock uses film techniques in [three chosen films] to demonstrate the inherent aggression of the female gaze when turned against men in an investigative context

Again, the good topic includes not only the subject matter (Hitchcock as auteur) but also pointed thematic question (female aggression) and a specific technical issue (how H. films the female gaze) that relates to the theme of the course (investigative surveillance).

**Now, once you've got that far, you'll need to come up with a working thesis, watch your films, sketch out YOUR OWN IDEAS, and then go and do some of that research.**

You should notice that the topics above are not even sentences, let alone fully developed thesis statements. A thesis statement renders a topic or idea into an arguable form that:

TAKES A CLEAR, ARGUMENTATIVE STANCE AND AIMS TO PROVE SOMETHING BEYOND THE SELF-EVIDENT "FACTS"

INDICATES THE SYNTHESIS OF THE TOPIC'S VARIOUS ELEMENTS

PROVIDES A SENSE OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PRODUCT OF THAT SYNTHESIS

ESTABLISHES CLEARLY THE PATH YOU WILL TAKE THROUGH THE EVIDENCE ON YOUR WAY TO PROVING YOUR POINT

So, as you should plainly see, you will need to do some work here to make up the difference between a topic and a thesis! For example:

*Topic 1 becomes a thesis:* The original 1980s films of the slasher dynasties *Halloween* and *Friday the 13th* play a complicated game with their inevitably teenage audiences. The most familiar motif of these films' sadistic violence is the shot motivated from the killer's point of view—a convention we now readily recognize as "monster cam"—that is so often trained on the unwitting victim-to-be, typically a teenager engaged in sexual activity. This shot and other techniques of suture create a peculiar system of feedback on the audience, whose identification is torn between voyeur and victim. Thus, the spectator's voyeuristic expectations are simultaneously gratified and punished, and the film carries out a paradoxical disciplinary commentary.

**ALSO: Please don't forget to use MLA format (not APA, Chicago or some made-up style) for every aspect of your essay, including:**

- proper integration of cited material, mechanically, logically, and grammatically
- in-text citations (parenthetical, not footnoted!)
- Works Cited page
- general layout of pages, header, numbering, etc.

If you need advice or assistance with this, please see me rather than turning in a paper that's not in proper format! And make sure your research uses **legitimate, academic sources!!!** Ask me if you're not sure!