THE THESIS SENTENCE: An Introduction

The thesis sentence is the most important sentence in an essay -- the one ruling idea you will support in the body of your paper. It serves as a plan for the writer and a “road map” for the reader. In a sense, it is a contract between the writer and the reader. The writer promises to prove the thesis to the reader.

The thesis is the writer’s opinion -- an argument, not a fact. Thus, it will have a limited topic and one or more opinion words. Both of the following sentences have the same limited topic -- “The Red-Headed League” -- but only one sentence also has an all-important opinion word.

**NO** “The Red-Headed League” is a short story.
**YES** “The Red-Headed League” is a good short story.

In addition, a thesis sentence usually indicates the minimum number of paragraphs an essay will require. Thus, the sample thesis would be improved by indicating specific components:

“The Red-Headed League” is a good story because of (the suspenseful plot) and (fascinating characters)

Of course, every essay will have an introduction and a conclusion -- but the number of paragraphs in the body will be determined by the number of components in the thesis.

Every Blank  =  An Essay Component  =  A Body Paragraph

**Part One:** The fill-in-the-blank theses below could be used in an informal essay about yourself. On the left, label the number of components promised by each.

1. I can best be described as _______________________ and _______________________.
2. I am ______________________, ______________________, and ______________________.
3. Although I see myself as ____________________________, other people may see me as ____________________________.
4. My ability as a ______________________ comes from _____________________________ and _____________________________.
5. Simple objects, such as ______________________ and ______________________, serve as symbols for the most important ______________________ in my life.
6. Because of _________________________________, I have changed from __________________________ to __________________________.
7. I used to be ___________________________; now I am ___________________________; someday I hope to be ____________________________.
8. My three most important goals are to ________________________________, to ________________________________, and to ________________________________.
9. My personality has been shaped by ____________________, ____________________, ____________________, and ____________________.
10. In the complex life I live, I seem to play many roles: a ____________________, a ____________________, and a ____________________.
Part Two: Now it’s your turn to go back to the theses in Part One and fill in the blanks with appropriate words. Remember that the words you choose must express some opinion. You are the “I”—so pick words that fit your life. Thinking carefully about each will help you with later assignments.

Part Three: Underline the basic components in the following theses. Then label in the left margin the number of components promised by each thesis.

1. Jabez Wilson may be best characterized as gullible and greedy.
2. Sherlock Holmes is both logical and intuitive.
3. While Dr. Watson is a romantic, Sherlock Holmes is a realist.
4. Sherlock Holmes ability as a detective derives from his powers of observation, his enormous store of knowledge, and his ability to draw logical conclusions.
5. Minor characters, such as Peter Jones, Duncan Ross, and Mr. Wetherby, serve an important function in “The Red-Headed League.”
6. Arthur Conan Doyle's choice of Dr. Watson as narrator helps with the characterization of Sherlock Holmes, provides opportunities for foreshadowing, and heightens suspense.
8. Successfully reading a mystery like “The Red-Headed League” challenges the reader to be part detective, part eavesdropper, part diviner.
9. Because of his own personality and abilities, Dr. John Watson stands in awe of Sherlock Holmes, but sees deeply into the heart of his friend.
10. Although both Holmes and Watson observe carefully and notice precise details, their differing interpretations of the same information reveal the difference between a “Good Reader” and a “Bad Reader.”

Part Four: Select one of the theses you wrote about yourself in Part One and use it as the thesis for your first essay. Copy the thesis sentence you have selected on the index card provided in class. Pick a thesis you can support. Choose carefully since you will share your paper with other students also.

When your thesis is approved by your teacher and your writing group, go on to the Plan Page provided in class.

1. Thesis Approved _____________________ due date
2. Plan Page Completed _____________________ due date
3. Rough Draft Shared _____________________ due date
4. Edited by Group _____________________ due date
5. Revised Final Draft _____________________ due date