

THE SHERIDAN BAKER THESIS MACHINE

Follow these steps to turn a topic idea into a working thesis for your paper:

Step 1: State the **topic** under consideration.

Examples: (a) cats, (b) writing classes, (c) grades

Step 2: State the specific **issue** in the form of a debating proposition.

- A. Resolved: Cats should be subject to leash laws.
- B. Resolved: Writing classes should be abolished.
- C. Resolved: Grades are unnecessary in college.

Step 3: Using a *because* clause, convert the resolution into a sentence that states your **position** on the issue and provides a main **rationale** for that position [= rough thesis].

- A. Cats should be subject to leash laws because they are inveterate wanderers.
- B. Writing classes should not be abolished because many students are unpracticed writers.
- C. Grades are unnecessary in college because students learn more rapidly without them.

Step 4: Polish and refine the rough thesis by adding **qualifications** (using an *although* clause) and removing the because clause [= thesis].

- A. Although it is against a cat's instinctive wanderlust to be restrained, the crowded nature of city life demands that cats not be allowed to roam around freely.
- B. Although gifted high school graduates should be exempt from writing classes, most entering students need help in attaining college-level writing skills.
- C. Although there may be a legitimate need to evaluate the work of college students, the traditional grading system hinders learning and stifles creativity.

Step 5: Test your faith in the thesis and explore potential counterarguments by **reversing** your position.

- A. The cat's independent and adaptable nature makes it the only pet capable of living an unrestricted existence within the city.
- B. Although introductory writing classes may have remedial value for some students, most high school graduates possess writing skills sufficient for success in college course.
- C. Traditional grading procedures may offend educational purists, but public school systems require pragmatic approaches to evaluation.

* Adapted from Sheridan Baker, *The Practical Stylist*