MAGIC THESIS STATEMENT

● A thesis fits comfortably into the Magic Thesis Statement (MTS).

By looking at _____, we can see _____, which most people don't see; this is important because _____.

● A thesis says something strange and different.

A. By telling the story of Westley and Buttercup's triumph over evil, *The Princess Bride* affirms the power of true love.

B. Although the main point of *The Princess Bride* rests on the natural power of true love, an examination of the way that fighting sticks (baseball bats, tree branches, and swords) link the frame story to romance plot suggests that the grandson is being trained in true love, that is not natural but socialized.

Both of these statements are perfectly correct. Only the second one says something, well, weird. Weird is good. Sentence A encourages the paper to produce precisely the evidence that everyone talks about; sentence B ensures that the paper will talk about something new and different. Many great papers start by pointing out something that seems to not make sense and then making sense of it.

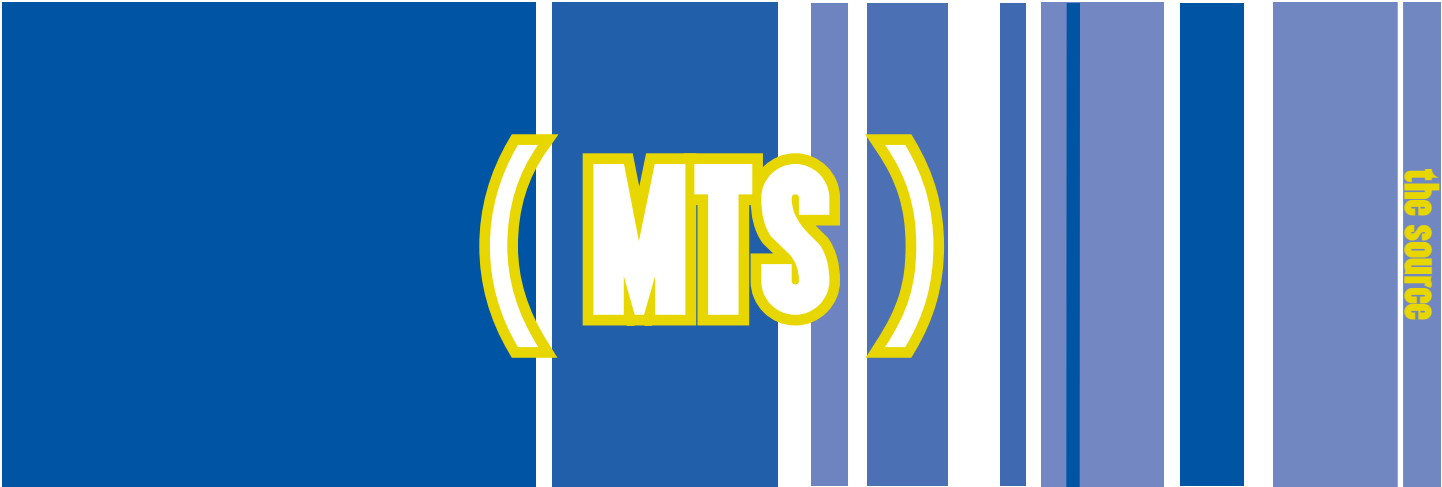● A thesis sets up a miniature road map for the paper to follow.

A. Reality dating shows aren't so real, after all.
B. Although, shows like *The Bachelor* and *Joe Millionaire* seem centered on individual choice, the receptive, scripted nature of each show's final segment--"Jen, will you accept this Rose?"--points to the gender and sexual conventions in dating.

If the components of your argument can be rearranged without changing the thesis, your thesis has a problem. If your thesis makes sense using phrases like "although" and "despite" you've got built in debatability and direction. It's also great idea to avoid the expose E! Celebrity News tone of the first example.

Dr. Emily Russell

● A thesis says something **specific** and **avoids great generalizations** about the world.

> **"Since the beginning of time..."**
> **"Throughout history..."**
> **"Around the world..."**

These phrases will make your professor cringe. Statements of this kind can fall into two camps: they are probably distorted generalizations that ignore complexity and nuance in the topic at hand, or you could be falling into truisms, claims that are so common and easily accepted that they lose all argumentative value. If it seems obvious, why are you writing about it?

● A thesis makes a lot of information irrelevant.

> **A.** Stereotypes of African Americans are prevalent in today's media.

All media? All over the world? What exactly do you mean by "stereotypes"? Would anyone be surprised by this claim? A strong thesis will choose a manageable topic or set of behaviors to explain.

> **B.** According to Neil Gotanda, Judge Karlin's sentencing colloquy against Soon Ja Du was striking in that she used a series of coded phrases to suggest race while seeming to obey the legal prohibition against taking race into account.

Gotanda's thesis defines its scope--the colloquy itself. It's specific and clear. Good signs. Remember, though, it's Gotanda's argument, not yours. In order to write successfully about another's critical work, you have to be able to both summarize and analyze their claims.

Dr. Emily Russell