Crafting your thesis statement and topic sentences

Crafting an effective thesis statement (and subsequent "topic sentences") may be a daunting task as you begin a piece of analytical writing—these few sentences are the crux of your argument and the bones that the rest of your essay rests on. This activity will help you to focus and prune your thesis and topic sentences.

What a thesis statement should do:

- Concisely define the argument of your entire paper.
- Combine the textual element(s) for analysis, the function(s) of the element(s) in the text, and the broader effect of the element(s) **in relation to theme/big ideas expressed in the text.**
- Specifically and explicitly state those "ingredients" mentioned above.
- Answer the "what," the "how," and "why" of the element(s) you're discussing.
- Encompass all of the information and analysis in your paper.

A weak thesis statement

- Makes no explicit or forceful claim—"Nora's decision at the end of *A Doll's House* shows both noble and selfish motives."
- Is too obviously true or a statement of fact—"Ibsen uses several symbols in *A Doll's House*."
- Restates conventional wisdom or a cliché—"Nora learns throughout the play that it's not what's on the outside but what's on the inside that counts."
- Makes an overly broad claim—"Ibsen criticizes the treatment of women in the 19th century."
- Offers personal beliefs/opinions as the main basis of argument—"Clearly, Nora's decision to leave was offensive and selfish."

What a topic sentence should do:

- Concisely define the argument of your current MSP paragraph.
- Combine the textual element(s) for analysis, the function(s) of the element(s) in this specific MSP, and **relate the effect(s) of the element back to your thesis statement**.
- Specifically and explicitly state those "ingredients" mentioned above.
- Answer the "what," the "how," and the "why" of the element(s) you're discussion.
- Encompass all of the information and analysis in this particular MSP.

Academic verbs: Some alternatives to "shows"

Reveals	Limits	Broadcasts	Corroborates
Demonstrates	Illuminates	Exposes	Validates
Illustrates	Clarifies	Uncloak	Manifests
Highlights	Exhibits	Proves	
Underscores	Uncovers	Verifies	
Undercuts	Divulges	Substantiates	