A great influence upon the success of your work is your ability to limit further the scope of your study with a preliminary thesis sentence. Now that you are processing more deeply into the subject, you should realize your completed study will need the unity of a central purpose. Consequently, you should write, in one sentence, a statement of the controlling idea that will unite your various findings. This thesis will thus serve as the nerve center of your paper: it will be amplified and developed with every word, every sentence, and every paragraph of the study.

The earlier the thesis is formulated, the earlier will a satisfactory working limitation be set on note taking. However, the thesis sentence may be changed as you progress in the study. You should not bind yourself, early in your work, to a thesis you cannot support or do not believe. In fact, the final, official thesis cannot be properly stated until after note taking is completed. Nevertheless, a preliminary central idea will aid in the origination of facts, limit the note taking, and eliminate needless research.

QUESTIONS often aid in the discovery of a thesis, but the thesis itself should be a declarative statement. For example, “What motivated Kennedy in his actions and decisions during the Cuban missile crisis?” And such a question might lead to the following thesis statement:

“Kennedy’s decisions in the Cuban missile crisis reveal his strong determination to protect American interests despite the threat of a nuclear war.”

This thesis limits the study to an investigation of Kennedy’s interest in the American position—not anybody else (Castro, Khrushchev) or anything else. Your thesis sentence will give you limits and direction.