Guide for Thesis Statements

Once you have settled on a topic for your essays, you need to start refining your ideas so that you can formulate a narrow, argumentative thesis. This guide demonstrates a typical progression of developing a clear argument, using Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* as a sample text. The most important step in the procedure is #4; you must have a question in mind that your essay will answer in order to produce a focused and effective piece of writing.

**Step 1: Choose a general topic**
- Comedy in *Don Quixote*

**Step 2: Brainstorm scenes that illustrate your topic**
- Don Quixote storms the windmills
- DQ with the goatherds
- DQ and Sancho Panza at the inn
- Sancho trying to reason with DQ

**Step 3: Determine a common element of those scenes**
- In every scene, Don Quixote makes a fool of himself because he thinks he is a valiant knight, when in reality he is an inept old country gentleman who has read too many romances.

**Step 4: Generate a critical question (or several questions)**
- What is the purpose or function of Cervantes’ comedy?
- What makes Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* such a fool?

**Step 5: Formulate a provisional argument** (don’t worry about grammar at this stage)
- The humor is *Don Quixote* comes from the protagonist thinking he is a hero in one of the romances he reads; Cervantes thinks the romances are absurd

**Step 6: Revise wording of thesis until it efficiently expresses your argument**
- Cervantes uses comedy in *Don Quixote* to satirize the absurdities of the knightly romances that were popular during the late 16th century.

**Special Note:** Do not consider your thesis statement final until you have finished your essay. Often during the writing process you will add or modify your overall argument, in which case you should revise your thesis accordingly.