BUILDING A THESIS…FROM THE GROUND UP

**3rd Story:** relates 2nd story thesis to the bigger picture, explains its significance—why it is important—and sets it in a new context. Open out to a wider view. It is the answer you get when you ask of a 2-story thesis, “So what?” A person reading such a thesis thinks, “I see why this argument matters.” However, be careful not to make a bigger claim than you are able to substantiate.

**2nd Story:** interprets; gives point of view on; and/or adds controversy to the facts of the first story. It takes a position on the facts which is not obvious, a position that a reasonable person could disagree with.

(Arguable) A person reading such a thesis thinks, “That’s an interesting point of view. Now prove it to me.” This does not mean the thesis has to be absurd; rather, it means to take one position out of a number of possible positions.

**1st Story:** describes the topic; gives the facts; makes an observation. Observations are non-controversial, i.e., no reasonable person would disagree with them. A person reading such a thesis thinks, “Yes, this is true.”

Example:

1st story: Conrad uses imagery of light and dark in *Heart of Darkness*.

2nd story: Conrad uses imagery of light and dark in *Heart of Darkness* to represent the contrast between civilization and savagery.

3rd story: Conrad uses imagery of light and dark in *Heart of Darkness* to represent the contrast between civilization and savagery, ultimately suggesting that civilization and savagery are less matters of the state of a culture than the state of an individual’s mind.

Checklist²:

- Not a self-evident statement or well-known fact?
- Gives readers an idea of the general direction of my paper and the evidence I will provide?
- A complete sentence, not a fragment?
- Not worded as a question?
- Neither too broad nor too specific?
- Does not contain elements which are extraneous or irrelevant to my paper?
- Avoids phrases like *I think* and *in my opinion*, which weaken my argument?
- Gives me something to prove, back up, and develop?

1 Condensed from the handout “Building a Thesis…From the Ground Up,” developed by the UC Berkeley Department of English.

2 From the handout “Thesis Activity (Fairytale Thesis),” developed by Luisa Giulianetti, Student Learning Center, UC Berkeley, © 1998 UC Regents.

Angela Jeng
Student Learning Center, University of California, Berkeley
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