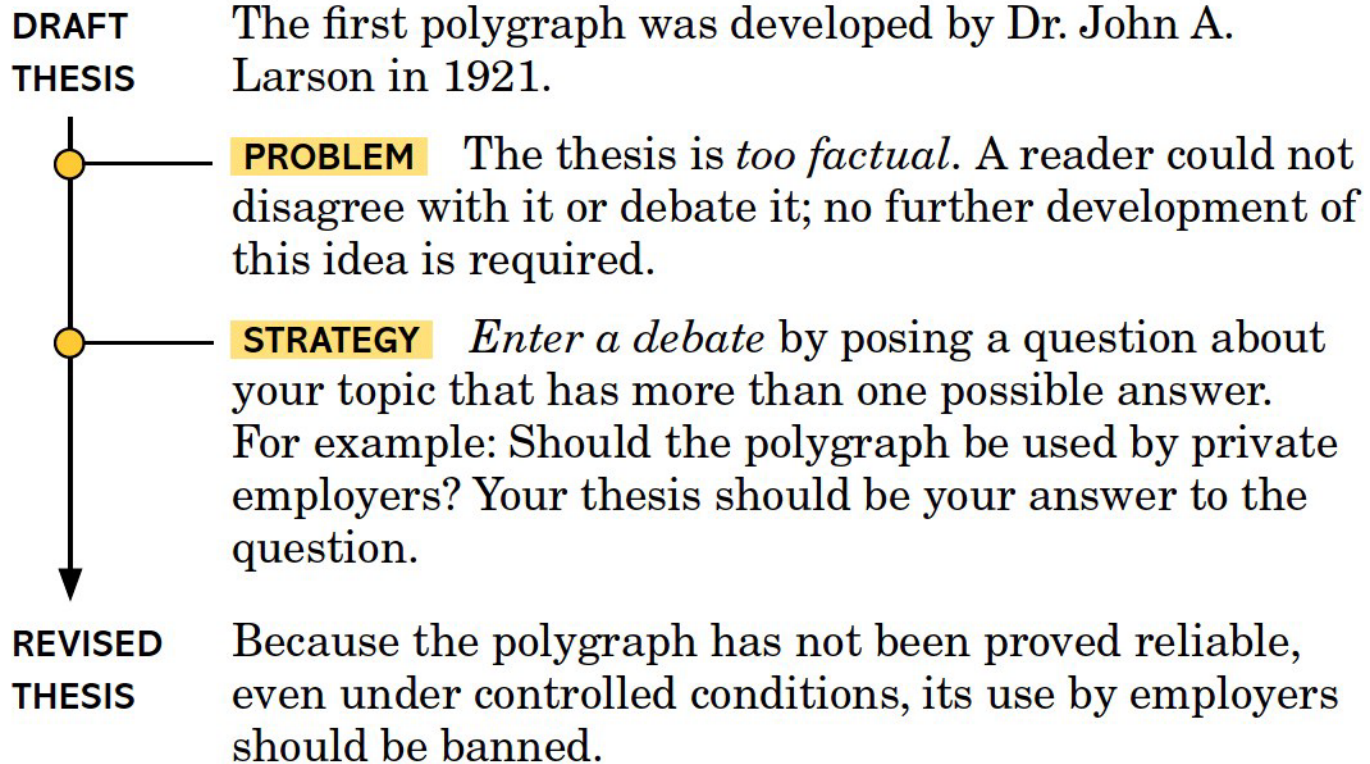


# Writing an Effective Thesis



# Writing an Effective Thesis

A thesis should be an answer to a question, not a question itself.

DRAFT  
THESIS

Would John F. Kennedy have continued to escalate the war in Vietnam if he had lived?



**PROBLEM** The thesis is a *question*, not an answer to a question.



**STRATEGY** *Take a position* on your topic by answering the question you have posed. Your thesis should be your answer to the question.

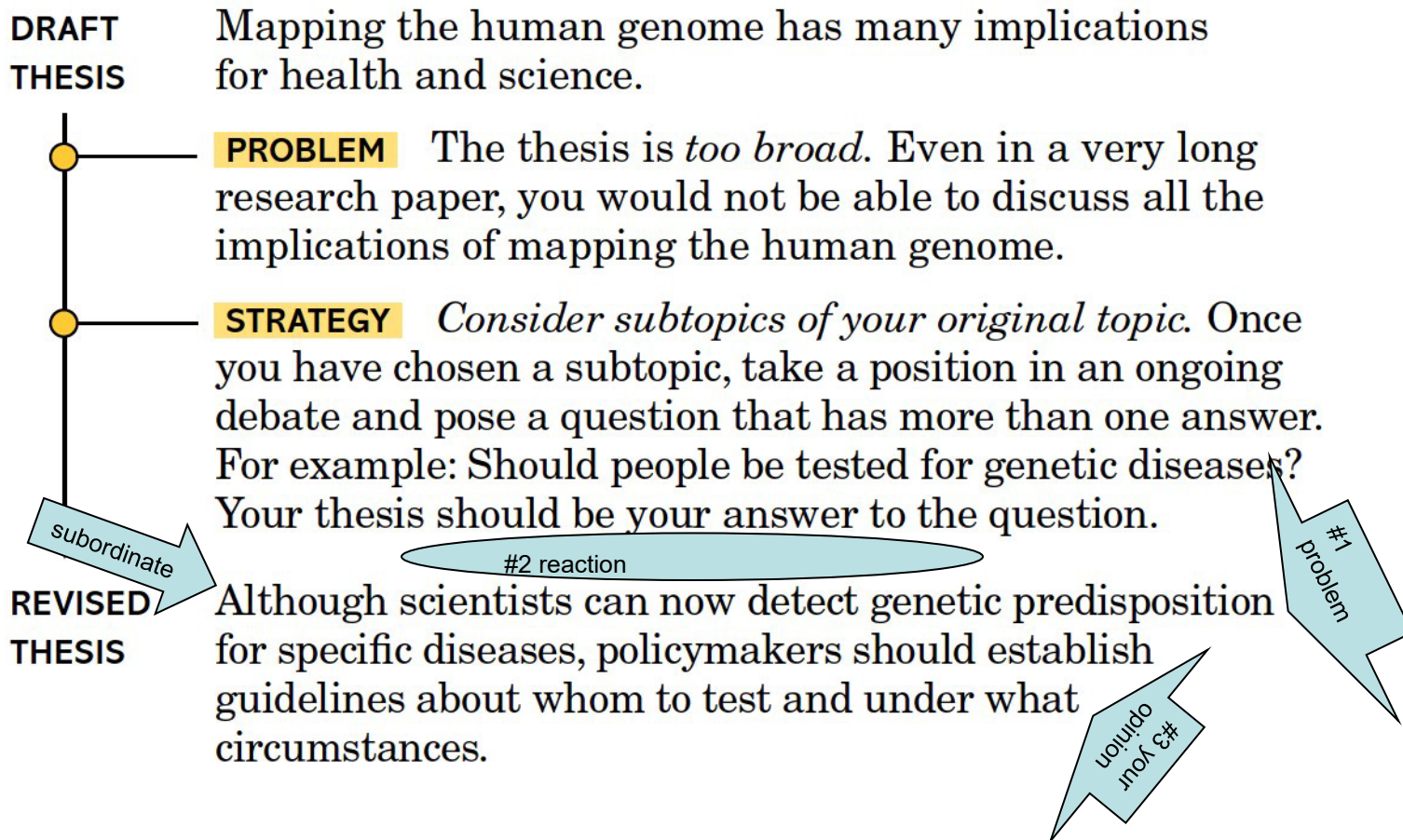


REVISED  
THESIS

Although John F. Kennedy sent the first American troops to Vietnam before he died, an analysis of his foreign policy suggests that he would not have escalated the war had he lived.

# Writing an Effective Thesis

A thesis should be of sufficient scope for your assignment; it should not be too broad.



# Writing an Effective Thesis

A thesis also should not be too narrow.

## DRAFT THESIS

A person who carries a genetic mutation linked to a particular disease might or might not develop that disease.



**PROBLEM** The thesis is *too narrow*. It does not suggest any argument or debate about the topic.



**STRATEGY** *Identify challenging questions* that readers might have about your topic. Then pose a question that has more than one answer. For example: Do the risks of genetic testing outweigh its usefulness? Your thesis should be your answer to this question.

## REVISED THESIS

Though positive results in a genetic test do not guarantee that the disease will develop, such results can cause psychological trauma; genetic testing should therefore be avoided in most cases.

# Writing an Effective Thesis

A thesis should be sharply focused, not too vague. Avoid fuzzy, hard-to-define words such as *interesting*, *good*, or *disgusting*.

DRAFT  
THESIS

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is an interesting structure.



**PROBLEM**

This thesis is *too fuzzy and unfocused*. It's difficult to define *interesting*, and the sentence doesn't give the reader any cues about where the essay is going.



**STRATEGY**

*Focus your thesis with concrete language and a clear plan.* Pose a question about the topic that has more than one answer. For example: How does the physical structure of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial shape the experience of visitors? Your thesis—your answer to the question—should use specific language that engages readers to follow your argument.



REVISED  
THESIS

By inviting visitors to see their own reflections in the wall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial creates a link between the present and the past.

# Testing a Working Thesis

Once you have come up with a working thesis, you can use the following questions to evaluate it.

- Does your thesis answer a question, propose a solution to a problem, or take a position in a debate?
- Does the thesis require an essay's worth of development? Or will you run out of points too quickly?
- Is the thesis too obvious? If you cannot come up with interpretations that oppose your own, consider revising your thesis.
- Can you support your thesis with the evidence available?
- Can you explain why readers will want to read an essay with this thesis? Can you respond when a reader asks "So what?"