How to Develop a Thesis
The Thesis Statement

• Start with an introduction to your topic
• Make a statement of what your paper is about
  – The central idea of your paper
    • What you will cover
    • How you will do it
    • What the reader can expect in terms of organization
Finding a Thesis

• The literature you read will address a specific research question
  – By what mechanism does something occur?
  – Why does something occur?
  – Who is something most likely to occur to?

• Your thesis will be your response to this question given your knowledge of the literature
Example of a research question and possible thesis

• From Hacker (2000) *A Pocket Style Manual*
  
  – **Research question**
    • How and to what extent have the great apes demonstrated language abilities akin to those of humans?
  
  – **Possible thesis topics**
    • How have apes spontaneously used language?
    • How creatively have apes used language?
    • Implications of ape language studies?
Exercise: Developing Theses

• Research question 1:
  – Is Treatment X more effective than Treatment Y?
  – Possible theses?

• Research question 2:
  – Which theory, A or B, better accounts for this phenomenon?
  – Possible theses?
Developing Theses continued

• Research question 3:
  – What questions remain unanswered by this literature and what kinds of research may address them?
  – Possible theses?

• Research question 4:
  – What puts certain individuals at-risk for particular psychological outcomes?
  – Possible theses?
Organizing Evidence

• Outline
• As you write your paper, the outline points become the headings and subheadings of your paper
• Follow the “open bow-tie” strategy
  – Evidence should start broad and get more focused as you systematically support your thesis
  – Implications should start focused and get as broad as your data allows (but do not go beyond your data!)
Use of the Literature

• Use the literature to support your thesis statement
  – Be a critical consumer (evaluate what you read)
    • What do you need to evaluate?
    • What makes evidence strong or weak?
  – Integrate what you read in a way that supports your thesis

• Ultimately, your thesis should be a reflection of your view of what the literature says

• Your voice should be heard, not the voices of the authors you have read
  – Don’t confuse this with using the pronoun “I”