Tips for (Re)Writing Thesis Statements

A Thesis Statement:

- must state an **arguable stance**
  EX: Langston Hughes shows that he is literate by writing a poem, and I show that I'm literate by writing this essay. (not arguable)
  EX: Traditional academic literacy benefits all people. (arguable, but the writer may want to add the reasons why he/she believes this)

- must ALSO demonstrate some kind of **tension**
  EX: While some privileged people, like me, often take their ability to read and write for granted, others like author Jimmy Baca view literacy itself as privilege because of the communicative freedom and liberating power that comes along with it.

- usually, in conjunction with the rest of the intro, gives some sense of the paper's **organization**
  EX: Based on the thesis statement above, the writer would need to include:
    - Definition of literacy (if not already earlier in intro)
    - Background on the writer and Baca
    - How the writer took his/her literacy for granted (and the significance of this)
    - How Baca saw literacy as a form of freedom and power (and the significance of this)
    - What the writer learned from Baca that changed how he/she perceived his/her own literacy

Guidelines for Fixing a Weak Thesis

1. Your thesis should make a claim with which readers may disagree

2. Be skeptical of your first response—often it can be too broad or too cliched

3. Convert broad categories and generic (anything fits) claims to more specific assertions

4. Submit the wording of your thesis to this grammatical test: if it follows the “abstract noun + is + evaluative adjective” formula (e.g., “the economic situation is bad”), substitute a more specific noun and an active verb (e.g., “tax laws benefit the rich”)

5. Examine and question your own terms and categories rather than simply accepting them

6. Be aware of or make explicit your unstated assumptions
Defining and Refining a Thesis*
1. Formulate an idea about your subject
2. See how far you can make this thesis go in accounting for your reasons & evidence
3. Locate evidence in your draft that is not accounted for by your thesis
4. Make explicit the apparent mismatch between thesis and evidence (from #3)
5. Reshape your thesis to accommodate the reasons/evidence that don’t fit.
6. Repeat steps 2, 3, 4, and 5 as many times as needed.

From Inquiry to Thesis Statement
1. What are you interested in discussing in your essay?

2. What specific question are you trying to answer in your essay?

3. What are 2-3 possible theses that you could use for your essay? (Hint: turn your question into a specific statement.)
   a) 
   b) 
   c) 

[*Source: Writing Analytically by Rosenwasser & Stephen (117)]