

A TROUBLESHOOTING GUIDE

A Clear, Arguable Thesis

My thesis is unclear or overgeneralized.

- Add more explanation.
- Refer to the story specifically.
- Add qualifying words like *some* or *usually*.

My thesis is not arguable or interesting.

- Respond to a question or class discussion.
- Summarize an alternative argument.
- Try additional suggestions for analysis from the Ways In boxes on pp. 457–60.

A Well-Supported Argument

My argument seems superficial or thin.

- Develop your ideas by connecting them.
- Link your ideas to make a chain of reasoning.
- Connect to a literary motif or theme.
- Add textual evidence by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing important passages.
- Focus on the writer's choice of words, explaining how particular word choices support your ideas.
- Consider using other kinds of support, such as information about the story's historical or cultural context.

The connection between a reason and its support seems vague.

- Explain why the support illustrates the point you are making.
- Explain what the quoted words imply — their connotative (cultural or emotional) associations as well as their denotative (literal or dictionary) meanings.
- Introduce quotations, and follow them with some analysis or explanation.
- Explain more fully and clearly how your reasons relate logically to one another as well as to your thesis.
- Fill in the gaps.
- Use contradictions or gaps to extend or complicate your argument.

A Clear, Logical Organization

My essay is hard to follow.

- Repeat key terms from the thesis and other introductory text.
- Provide explicit topic sentences.
- Add logical transitions.