

## Building a Thesis Statement

A thesis statement establishes your main claim/argument that is supported by the remainder of your essay. Think of writing your essay like constructing a building.



1. Start by surveying the “rubble,” all the data relevant to your topic. Looking around helps you **understand the overall terrain.**



2. Once you understand the general landscape, start **selecting “building blocks,”** or pieces of evidence that seem most relevant to your question. As you collect, start to develop a mental blueprint of the building.



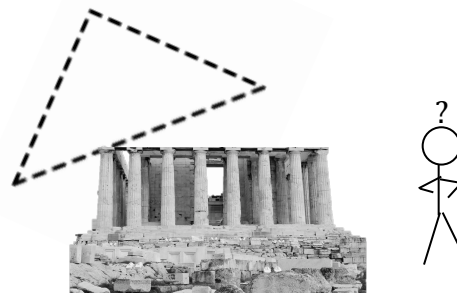
3. Start **grouping similar blocks,** or evidence, to build the different supporting pillars.



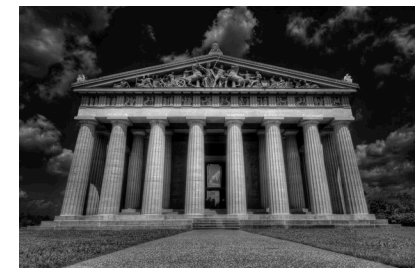
4. Hopefully, as you build your multiple supporting pillars, you have come up with some idea about your overall argument.



5. However, you may find that some pillars aren't supporting that thesis – time to revise! Return to step 2!



6. Revise until your supporting points fit under the overall argument



## EXAMPLE

Now that we have our analogy, let's apply it to an example. Consider that you've selected the topic of Andrew Carnegie.

*Step 1.* You survey the terrain and find that most of what's written about Andrew Carnegie is very positive, his immense financial success, contributions to the US manufacturing industry, and his huge donations to philanthropic causes. However, some sources talk about Carnegie's "dark side," how he did not pay his workers fairly or treat them well.

*Step 2.* You start selecting sources that seem relevant to the dark side aspect, which intrigues you. You find, for example, sources that talk about the strained labor conditions.

*Step 3.* You start grouping these sources:

Group 1: Unfair wages

- insufficient pay given the local economy
- unpaid vacations
- taking a lion's share of the wages

Group 2: High pressure environment

- Workers being constantly monitored
- Collaboration and resting highly discouraged
- Being paid on output rather than hours



*Step 4.* You have an idea about your overall argument: Andrew Carnegie exploited his workers...

*Step 5.* ...but this does not fit in the points about his positive contributions to society.

*Step 6.* You revise to create the following thesis: "While Andrew Carnegie's contributions to industry and philanthropic causes in Pennsylvania are often portrayed as a narrative of achieving the American dream, this narrative often ignores his callous treatment of the workers who helped him achieve that dream."

**A NOTE ON COMPLEXITY:** Note above that **the thesis is strong because it is complex**: it can be argued against. In contrast, the thesis "Gandhi's philosophy promotes nonviolence" is not worth proving since no one objects to it. A complex thesis should require argumentation because it is novel and shows original thought.

**A NOTE ON ROADMAPS:** The thesis above also sets up a roadmap of the entire essay that the writer must follow. For instance, we can expect this writer to first discuss Carnegie's purported achievement of the American dream, then focus on his ruthless treatment of his workers.