Writing Program supplement #3:
French 217: Forming a thesis statement

The thesis sentence--usually presented at the end of the introduction--indicates the paper's topic and the writer's position on that topic. In academic writing, it should also efficiently and tactfully hint at the general organization of the paper.

Functions of the thesis sentence:

- Narrows the topic to a single idea that will be the focus of the essay.
- Asserts something about the topic, conveying the writer's purpose, opinion, and attitude.
- Provides a concise preview of how main ideas are arranged.

The paper's primary purpose is to persuade the reader that the thesis is valid. You might construct a thesis in stages:

1. Select a topic (e.g. *Le Cid* et la misogynie / l’exil / l’orient et la prise de conscience de l’autre / objets et symboles dans les *lais* de Marie de France / Chimène: bourreau ou victime?)
2. Write a sentence in which you tell yourself what the paper will about. "I want to write a paper about [a topic] in order to [purpose] so that they will [goal]."
3. Change the above statement so that it expresses an idea that can be supported effectively.

A good thesis:

- Is restricted so that it narrowly defines the scope of the paper, (in talking about “l’orient et la prise de conscience de l’autre” you might want to limit yourself to the “Fils du grand Turc” scene in Molière and to selected letters from Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes*; likewise, in discussing objects and symbols in Marie de France, you might want to focus on a particular figure—birds maybe? in selected—3 or 4 *lais*)

- Is not a statement of fact, but rather a stated opinion, (not: “The works of Montesquieu and Molière both present perceptions of the East”; but “In the “Fils du Grand turc” scene and in the letters of Uzbek and Rica, Molière and Montesquieu lead their readers to consider what it is to be French”; or, not: “The portrait of Chimène includes characteristics of both victim and victimizer”, but rather, “Despite indications of unbridled revenge, Chimène is ultimately a victim of society’s emphasis on duty”.)

- Is unified in that all elements of the thesis relate to one another.

- Presents the relation of those elements in a way that reflects your tentative plans for the organization of the paper.