The Three-Story Thesis

> There are one-story intellects, two-story intellects, and three-story intellects with skylights. All fact collectors who have no aim beyond their facts are one-story men. Two-story men compare, reason, generalize, using the labor of fact collectors as their own. Three-story men idealize, imagine, predict—their best illumination comes from above the skylight.
>
> —Oliver Wendell Holmes (1841-1935)

Holmes' idea about kinds of intellect is easily transferable to the problem of creating interesting and analytically powerful theses. This is the kind of thesis I expect to see you using in your remaining essay.

One-Story Thesis

The one-story thesis demonstrates your ability to collect and report facts. Usually a paper with a one-story thesis simply requires you to stitch together a bunch of summaries. While this kind of thesis might be appropriate for some essay exams, it isn't adequate for college-level writing. It is like a cup of instant coffee—yes, it has caffeine, so on one level it gets the job done, but it doesn't taste that great.

One-story theses send to be "what" questions: they tell you what a text is about, but no more. They only approach a text's surface or skin.

is a book about a man escaping from society into nature.

Etc.

A paper with a three-story thesis has a shot at the A.

On Structure

What to Avoid: The Hub-and-Spoke

A hub-and-spoke argument begins with a single, often simplistic idea (for example, “Thoreau is the ultimate individualist”) and then has a number of paragraphs, each of which presents evidence pointing to the general applicability of that idea (he goes off to live by himself, he seems to prefer nature to people, etc.). The trouble is that you will end up with a bunch of