

specific areas the paper will explore. I can also tell that the subject is narrow enough for a fairly thorough examination of one small slice of these two major choreographers' work rather than some overgeneralized treatment of these two historic figures.

—KAREN DEARBORN, PROFESSOR OF DANCE

Making a Thesis Evolve

Another common misunderstanding about the thesis is that it must appear throughout the paper in essentially the same form—fixed and unchanging. In fact, it is only a weakly developed thesis that, like an inert (unreactive) material, neither makes anything happen nor undergoes any change itself. Think of the thesis as an agent of change. The thesis itself changes in an inductive essay. In a deductive essay, the thesis changes the way readers understand the range and implications of that claim.

Developing a Thesis Is More than Repeating an Idea

Weak thesis statements (poorly formulated and inadequately developed) are most easily detected by their repetitiveness and predictability. The writer says the same thing again and again, drawing the same overgeneralized conclusion from each piece of evidence (“and so, once again we see that . . .”).

Weak thesis statements tend to produce demonstrations. Demonstrations point at something—“See?”—and then they’re done with it. Demonstrations are not really interested in seeing into things—only at looking at them from a distance to confirm a point. The staple of the demonstration is five-paragraph form, which we critiqued at some length in Chapter 4. The form predisposes the writer to begin with a big claim, such as “Environmentalism prevents economic growth,” and then offer a paragraph on each of three examples (say, statutes that protect endangered wildlife, inhibit drilling for oil, and levy excessive fines on violators). Then the big claim simply gets repeated again in the conclusion.

At the least, such a thesis is inaccurate. It’s too easy to find exceptions to the claim and also to question what its key words actually mean. Mightn’t environmentalism also promote economic growth by, say, promoting tourism? And is the meaning of economic growth self-evident? Couldn’t a short-term economic boon be a long-term disaster, as might be the case for oil exploration in the polar regions?

In contrast, in nearly all good writing the thesis gains in complexity as well as precision and accuracy as the paper progresses. Developing a thesis, in other words, means making the paper’s thinking evolve, pruning and shaping it in response to evidence.

In cases where the thesis itself cannot evolve, as, for example, in the report format of the natural and social sciences where the initial hypothesis must be either confirmed or denied, there is still movement (conceptual development) between the beginning of the paper and the end, rather than repeated assertion of one idea.

The Thesis as Lens: The Reciprocal Relationship Between Thesis and Evidence

One function of the thesis is to provide the connective tissue, so to speak, that holds together a paper’s three main parts—beginning, middle, and end. Periodic reminders of your paper’s thesis, its central unifying idea, are essential for keeping both you and your readers on track. But there is a big difference between developing and just repeating an idea.

It is in establishing this key difference between development and repetition that the analogy of thesis as connective tissue breaks down. A better way of envisioning how a thesis operates is to think of it as a camera lens. The advantage of this analogy is that it more accurately describes the relationship between the thesis and the subject it seeks to explain: while the lens affects how we see the subject (what evidence we select, what questions we ask about that evidence), the subject we are looking at affects how we adjust the lens.

The relationship between thesis and subject is, in other words, reciprocal. In good analytical writing, especially in the earlier, investigatory stages of writing and thinking, the thesis not only directs the writer’s way of looking at evidence, the analysis of evidence should also direct and redirect (bring about revision of) the thesis. Even in a final draft, writers are usually adjusting—fine-tuning—their governing idea in response to their analysis of evidence.

The enemy of good analytical writing is the fuzzy lens—imprecisely worded thesis statements. Very broad thesis statements, those that are made up of imprecise (fuzzy) terms, make bad camera lenses. They blur everything together, muddying important distinctions. If your lens is insufficiently sharp, you are not likely to see much in your evidence. If you say, for example, that education is costly, you will at least have some sense of direction, a means of moving forward in your paper, but the imprecise terms “education” and “costly” don’t provide you with a focus clear enough to distinguish significant detail in your evidence. Without significant detail for you to analyze, you can’t develop your thesis, either by showing readers what the thesis is good for (what it allows us to understand and explain) or by refining and clarifying its terms.

Induction and Deduction: Two Paths a Thesis May Take

In Chapter 4, Reasoning from Evidence to Claims, we defined two ways that a piece of thinking can progress: inductively—from particular details to a general principle to which the details point, and deductively—from a general principle to details that it serves to explain. Chapter 4 presented as the mainstay of inductive thinking—in fact, of all good thinking—the practice we call *inductive example* (1). We used the term *inductive example* (1) about a single representative making as many observations as possible (10) about a single representative wherein a writer attaches a single claim (1) to a number of examples (10). You will need to keep these terms—inductive and deductive, *inductive example* (1) and *deductive example* (10)—in mind as we take you through this chapter’s strategies for making a thesis evolve.

In inductively organized papers and in exploratory writing, the thesis changes as the paper progresses in order to more fully and accurately respond to evidence. Thus, the initial appearance of the thesis is usually fuzzier, less clearly worked out, than it is in the conclusion. This is because inductive writing repeatedly uses potentially conflicting evidence to bring the opening version of the thesis into better focus. In this kind of paper you should suspect that a claim worded in the conclusion almost exactly as it was in the beginning has not adequately responded to evidence.

In deductively organized papers, the wording of the thesis statement does not change, or at least not very much, but what the thesis serves to reveal in the evidence becomes progressively more complex. In social science writing, for example, which typically follows the IMRAD format common to all the sciences—Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion—the evolution of the paper's thinking occurs in the concluding discussion section, where the writer theorizes his or her results. Here the writer does not just repeat the paper's opening claim (hypothesis). Even when the writer finds evidence to confirm the hypothesis, he or she uses the discussion section to develop a fuller understanding of what these results might mean. (For more on common formats in the sciences, see Chapter 9.)

In practice, good thinking is always a blend of induction and deduction. Claims lead to selection and analysis of evidence. Evidence leads to the reconsideration of the claims. Whether a paper is primarily inductive and the wording of its thesis actually changes as it encounters evidence, or is primarily deductive and the wording of the thesis does not change, the thesis functions as a lens that responds to evidence as the writing proceeds.

Making a Thesis Evolve: A Brief Inductive Example

First let's consider an inductive example. More often than not, when inexperienced writers face a situation in which evidence seems to be unclear or contradictory, they tend to make one of two unproductive moves: they either ignore the conflicting evidence, or they abandon the problem altogether and look for something more clear-cut to write about. Faced with evidence that complicates your thesis, the one thing not to do is run away.

The savvy writer will actively seek out complicating evidence, taking advantage of chances to bring out complications in order to make the thesis more fully responsive to evidence. Let's revisit a sample thesis from the discussion of uncovering assumptions in Chapter 2, "tax laws benefit the wealthy." If you were to seek out data that would complicate this overstated claim, you would soon encounter evidence that would press you to make some distinctions that the initial formulation of this claim leaves obscure. You would need, for example, to distinguish different sources of wealth and then to determine whether all or just some wealthy taxpayers are benefited by tax laws.



FIGURE 6.1

A strong thesis evolves as it confronts and assimilates evidence; the evolved thesis may expand or restrict the original claim. The process may need to be repeated a number of times.

Do people whose wealth comes primarily from investments benefit less (or more) than those whose wealth comes from high wages? Evidence might also lead you to consider whether tax laws, by benefiting the wealthy, also benefit other people indirectly. Both of these considerations would necessitate some reformulation of the thesis. By the end of the paper, the claim that tax laws benefit the wealthy would have evolved into a more carefully defined and qualified statement that would reflect the thinking you have done in your analysis of evidence. This, by and large, is what good concluding paragraphs do—they reflect back on and reformulate your paper's initial position in light of the thinking you have done about it (see Figure 6.1).

But, you might ask, isn't this reformulating of the thesis something a writer does before he or she writes the essay? Certainly some of it is accomplished in the early exploratory writing and note-taking stage. But your finished paper will necessarily do more than list conclusions. Your revision process will have weeded out various false starts and dead ends that you may have wandered into on the way to your finished ideas, but the main routes of your movement from a tentative idea to a refined and substantiated theory should remain visible for readers to follow. To an extent, all good writing reenacts the chains of thought that led you to your conclusions.

Making a Thesis Evolve: A Brief Deductive Example

Now let's turn to a deductive example. A good deductive paper is best thought of as an experiment. In the experiment, the writer proposes a theory and then sees how far it is possible to go in getting the theory to satisfactorily explain whatever it is the writer has been observing. Evolution of the paper's thinking takes place when the writer tries to explain what happened when the theory met the evidence.

Let's take as an example a political science paper about people's responses to global warming. In political science papers, and more generally in social science writing, papers tend to begin with a broader theory from which the writer derives an hypothesis, a conjecture about what might happen, which the paper would then test.

We might speculate, for example, that people with more education would be more likely to use evidence to change, rather than to confirm, their views on global warming. This hypothesis might flow from the broader theory that educated people are less prone to dogmatism and thus are more capable of

learning. The paper would then apply this hypothesis to evidence, usually statistical evidence, to see if it holds.

The aim of the paper would not be just to support or not support the hypothesis. A good deductive paper would also analyze results that only partially supported the hypothesis or complicated it. The paper might even conclude by analyzing why the evidence did not confirm the hypothesis.

Let's suppose the results of our study revealed the opposite of what our hypothesis predicted: educated people are less likely to change their views when confronted with evidence. To explain this result, our thinking would have to evolve. Was the result a measurement issue? Were we measuring "educated" wrong? Was the result a sampling issue (a methodological explanation)? Or what if our assumptions about the effects of education were too narrow? Might the educated be less likely to believe evidence because their education has trained them to be skeptical?

In virtually any good deductive study, the thinking will evolve somehow. Perhaps some secondary feature, something new, may emerge in the discussion as the primary feature. Perhaps the results will help us understand more fully why we obtained the results that we expected. Perhaps the study will suggest possibilities for future research.

For now it is enough to emphasize that too many of us fail to recognize that a hypothesis is a speculation—a guess. The goal is not to have the answer before you begin, but to see where the results of testing the hypothesis might lead. This is where the hypothesis in a deductive paper causes new thinking to happen.

As these two examples illustrate, whether the thesis in a paper develops inductively, thus appearing in its fullest and most accurate form only at the end, or deductively, stated in full at the outset, the writer would not simply restate in the conclusion what he or she had proposed in the introduction. In both cases, the thinking would evolve.

The Evolving Thesis as Hypothesis and Conclusion in the Natural and Social Sciences

The natural and social sciences generally use a pair of terms, *hypothesis* and *conclusion*, for the single term *thesis*. Because writing in the sciences is patterned according to the scientific method, writers in disciplines such as biology and psychology must report how the original thesis (*hypothesis*) was tested against empirical evidence and then conclude on this basis whether or not the hypothesis was confirmed.

The scientific method is in sync with one of the chapter's main points, that something must happen to the thesis between the introduction and the conclusion. And as we have just demonstrated, although the hypothesis does not change (or evolve), the testing of it and subsequent interpretation of those results produce commentary on and, often, qualifications of the paper's central claim.

WRITING FROM ACTIONS THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD The Hypothesis as a Pair of Natural and Social Sciences Thesis Propositions

The best papers are clear and up front about what their point is, then use evidence and argument to support and evaluate the thesis. I encourage students to have a sentence immediately following their discussion of the background on the subject that can be as explicit as: "In this paper I will argue that while research on toxic effects of methyl bromide provides troubling evidence for severe physiological effects, conclusive proof of a significant environmental hazard is lacking at this time."

I try to avoid the use of the term "hypothesis." I think it gives the false sense that scientists always start with an idea about how something works. Frequently, that is not the case. Some of the best science has actually come from observation. Darwin's work on finches is a classic example. His ideas about adaptation probably derived from the observation.

—BRUCE WIGHTMAN, PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY

If the empirical evidence doesn't confirm your hypothesis, you rethink your hypothesis, but it's a complex issue. Researchers whose hypotheses are not confirmed in fact often question their *method* ("if I had more subjects" or "a better manipulation of the experimental group" or "a better test of intelligence," etc.) as much as their hypothesis. And that's often legitimate. Part of the challenge of psychological research is its reliance on a long array of assumptions. Failure to confirm a hypothesis could mean a problem in any of that long array of assumptions. So failure to confirm your hypothesis is often difficult to interpret.

—ALAN TIELTVEIT, PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY

Economists do make pretense to follow scientific methodology. Thus we are careful not to mix hypothesis and conclusion. I think it's important to distinguish between what is conjectured, the working hypothesis, and what ultimately emerges as a result of an examination of the evidence. Conclusions come only after some test has been passed.

—JAMES MARSHALL, PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS

Evolving a Thesis in an Exploratory Draft: The Example of *Las Meninas*

Because the writing process is a way not just of recording but of discovering ideas, writers, especially in the early stages of drafting, often set out with one idea or direction in mind and then, in the process of writing, happen upon another, potentially better idea that only begins to emerge in the draft. Once you've recognized them, these emerging thoughts may lead to your evolving a markedly different thesis, or they may provide you with the means of extending your paper's original thesis well beyond the point you'd settled for initially.

Writers undertake this kind of conceptual revision—locating and defining the thesis—in different ways. Some writers rely on repeatedly revising while they work their way through a first draft (which, when finished, will be close to a final draft). Others move through the first draft without much revision and then comprehensively rethink and restructure it (sometimes two, three, or more times). Whatever mode of revision works best for you, the thinking processes we demonstrate here are central. They are the common denominators of the various stages of the drafting process.

Our means of demonstrating how writers use exploratory writing to locate and develop a workable thesis is to take you through the steps a student writer would follow in revising her initial draft on a painting, *Las Meninas* (Spanish for “the ladies in waiting”) by the seventeenth-century painter, Diego Velázquez. We are using a paper on a painting because all of the writer’s data (the details of the painting) are on one page, allowing you to think with the writer as she develops her ideas.

As you read the draft, watch how the writer goes about developing the claim made at the end of her first paragraph—that, despite its complexity, the painting clearly reveals at least some of the painter’s intentions (referred to elsewhere in the paper as what the painting is saying, what it suggests, or what the painter wants). We have underlined each appearance of potential thesis statements in the text of the paper. Using square brackets at the ends of paragraphs, we have described the writer’s methods for arriving at ideas: NOTICE AND FOCUS, THE METHOD, ASKING “SO WHAT?,” and TO ON 1 (see Chapters 1 and 4).

There are a number of good things about this student paper when considered as an exploratory draft. Studying it will help you train yourself to turn a more discriminating eye on your own works in progress, especially in that all-important early stage in which you are writing in order to discover ideas.

Velázquez’s Intentions in *Las Meninas*

[1] Velázquez has been noted as being one of the best Spanish artists of all time. It seems that as Velázquez got older, his paintings became better. Toward the end of his life, he painted his masterpiece, *Las Meninas*. Out of all his works, *Las Meninas* is the only known self-portrait of Velázquez. There is much to be said about *Las Meninas*. The painting is very complex, but some of the intentions that Velázquez had in painting *Las Meninas* are very clear. [The writer opens with background information and a broad working thesis (underlined).]

[2] First, we must look at the painting as a whole. The question that must be answered is: who is in the painting? The people are all members of the Royal Court of the Spanish monarch Philip IV. In the center is the king’s daughter, who eventually became Empress of Spain. Around her are her *meninas* or ladies-in-waiting. These *meninas* are all daughters of influential men. To the right of the *meninas* is a dwarf who is a servant, and the family dog who looks fierce but is easily tamed by the foot of a child. The more unique people in the painting are Velázquez, himself, who stands to the left in front of a large canvas; the king and queen,

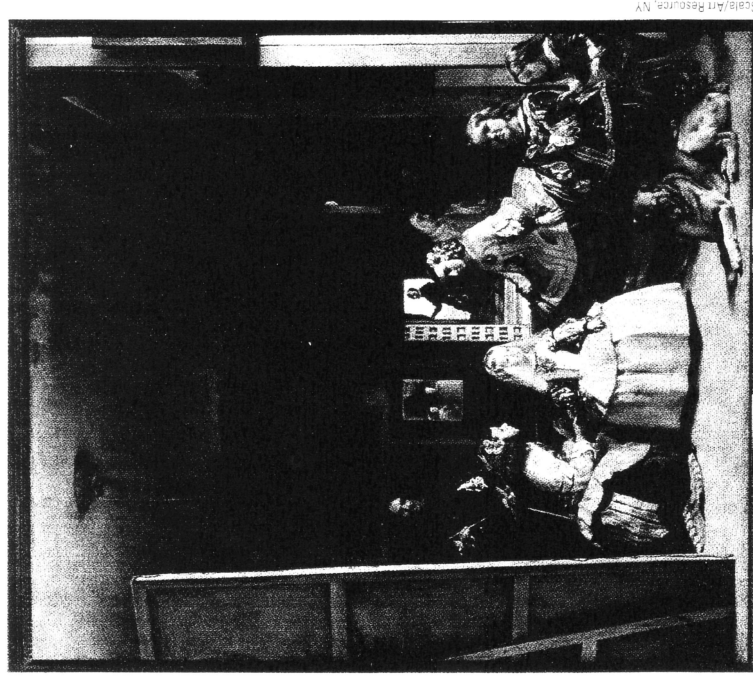


FIGURE 6.2

Las Meninas by Diego Velázquez, 1656. Approximately 10'5" × 9'. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

whose faces are captured in the obscure mirror; the man in the doorway; and the nun and man behind the *meninas*. To analyze this painting further, the relationship between characters must be understood. [The writer describes the evidence and arrives at an operating assumption—focusing on the relationship among characters.]

[3] Where is this scene occurring? Most likely it is in the palace. But why is there no visible furniture? Is it because Velázquez didn't want the viewers to become distracted from his true intentions? I believe it is to show that this is not just a painting of an actual event. This is an event out of his imagination. [The writer begins pushing observations to tentative conclusions by asking so what?]

[4] Now, let us become better acquainted with the characters. The child in the center is the most visible. All the light is shining on her. Maybe Velázquez is suggesting that she is the next light for Spain and that even God has approved her by shining all

the available light on her. Back in those days there was a belief in the divine right of kings, so this just might be what Velázquez is saying. **[The writer starts ranking evidence for importance and continues to ask, so WHAT?; she arrives at a possible interpretation of the painter's intention.]**

[5] The next people of interest are the ones behind the *meninas*. The woman in the habit might be a nun and the man a priest.

[6] The king and queen are the next group of interesting people. They are in the mirror, which is to suggest they are present, but they are not as visible as they might be. Velázquez suggests that they are not always at the center where everyone would expect them to be. **[The writer continues using NOTICE AND FOCUS plus asking so WHAT?; in addition to looking for pattern in the painting's details, the writer has begun to notice evidence—the minimal presence of the king and queen in the painting—that could complicate her initial interpretation about the divine right of kings.]**

[7] The last person and the most interesting is Velázquez. He dominates the painting along with the little girl. He takes up the whole left side along with his gigantic easel. But what is he painting? As I previously said, he might be painting the king and queen. But I also think he could be pretending to paint us, the viewers. The easel really gives this portrait an air of mystery because Velázquez knows that we, the viewers, want to know what he is painting. **[The writer starts doing 10 on 1 with her selection of what she has selected as the most significant detail—the size and prominence of the painter.]**

[8] The appearance of Velázquez is also interesting. His eyes are focused outward here. They are not focused on what is going on around him. It is a steady stare. Also interesting is his confident stance. He was confident enough to place himself in the painting of the royal court. I think that Velázquez wants the king to give him the recognition he deserves by including him in the "family." And the symbol on his vest is the symbol given to a painter by the king to show that his status and brilliance have been appreciated by the monarch. It is unknown how it got there. It is unlikely that Velázquez put it there himself. That would be too outright, and Velázquez was the type to give his messages subtly. Some say that after Velázquez's death, King Philip IV himself painted it to finally give Velázquez the credit he deserved for being a loyal friend and servant. **[The writer continues doing 10 on 1 and asking so WHAT? about the painter's appearance; this takes her to three tentative theses (underlined above).]**

[9] I believe that Velázquez was very ingenious by putting his thoughts and feelings into a painting. He didn't want to offend the king, who had done so much for him. It paid off for Velázquez because he did finally get what he wanted, even if it was after he died. **[The writer concludes and is now ready to redraft to tighten links between evidence and claims, formulate a better working thesis, and make this thesis evolve.]**

From Details to Ideas: Arriving at a Working Thesis in an Exploratory Draft

An exploratory draft uses writing as a means of arriving at a working thesis that the next draft can more fully evolve. Most writers find that their best ideas emerge near the end of the exploratory draft, which is the case in this student draft (see the three claims underlined in paragraph 8).

The *Las Meninas* paper is a good exploratory draft. The writer has begun to interpret details and draw plausible conclusions from what she sees, rather than just describing the scene depicted on the canvas or responding loosely to it with her unanalyzed impressions. The move from description to analysis and interpretation begins when you select certain details in your evidence as more important than others and explain what they seem to you to suggest. The writer has done both of these things, and so has gotten to the point where she can begin methodically evolving her initial ideas into a perceptive analysis.

What is especially good about the draft is that it reveals the writer's willingness to push on from her first idea (reading the painting as an endorsement of the divine right of kings, expressed by the light shining on the princess) by seeking out complicating evidence. The process of revising for ideas begins in earnest when you start checking to make sure that the thesis you have formulated accounts for as much of the available evidence as possible and does not avoid evidence that might complicate or contradict it.

The writer's first idea (about divine right), for example, does not account for enough of the evidence and is undermined by evidence that clearly doesn't fit, such as the small size and decentering of the king and queen, and the large size and foregrounding of the painter himself. Rather than ignoring these troublesome details, the writer instead zooms in on them. She focuses on the painter's representation of himself and of his employers, the king and queen, as the 1 for DOING 10 ON 1 (making a number of observations about a single representative piece of evidence and analyzing it in depth).

Six Steps for Finding and Evolving a Thesis in an Exploratory Draft
Getting the thesis to respond more fully to evidence, either by formulating a mostly new thesis and beginning again, or by modifying the existing thesis, is the primary activity of conceptual revision (as opposed to correcting and editing). Your aim here is not to go round and round forever, but to go back and forth between thesis and evidence, evidence and thesis, allowing each, in turn, to adjust how you see the other, until you find the best possible fit between the two. As we say in the section of this chapter on the thesis as camera lens, the thesis not only directs a writer's way of looking at evidence; the analysis of evidence should also direct and redirect—bring about revision of—the thesis.

What follows is a six-step guide for formulating and reformulating (evolving) a thesis. As an overarching guideline, allow your thesis to run up against potentially conflicting evidence ("but what about this?") in order to build upon

and revise your initial idea, extending the range of evidence it can accurately account for by clarifying and qualifying its key terms.

Here is a list of the six steps:

1. Formulate a working thesis or, in revision, locate multiple and possibly competing thesis statements in your draft.
2. Explain how the details you have focused on in the evidence lead to your working thesis.
3. Locate evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the working thesis and pursue the implications of that evidence by repeatedly asking "so what?" Explain how and why these pieces of evidence complicate the working thesis.
4. Use your analysis of the complicating evidence to reformulate the thesis. Share with readers your reasons for moving from your initial claim to this reformulation.
5. Test the adequacy of the evolved thesis by repeating steps two, three, and four until you are satisfied that the thesis statement accounts for your evidence as fully and accurately as possible. The best test of a thesis is to see how much of the relevant evidence it can reasonably account for.
6. Rewrite the draft into a more coherent and fuller analysis of evidence, while retaining for readers the "thesis trail"—the various steps that you went through along the way to formulating the thesis you ultimately chose.

Step 1: Formulate a working thesis or, in revision, locate multiple and possibly competing thesis statements in your draft.

Go through your draft and underline potential thesis statements (as we have done in the student's draft). View the presence of multiple, perhaps even competing, theses as an opportunity rather than a problem. In an exploratory draft, a range of interpretations of evidence constitutes raw material, the records of your thinking that might be developed in a more finished draft.

In the *Las Meninas* paper no single idea emerges clearly as the thesis. Instead, the writer has arrived (in paragraph 8) at three related but not entirely compatible ideas:

"I think that Velázquez wants the king to . . ."

Thesis 1: give Velázquez "the recognition he deserves by including him in the 'family'."

Thesis 2: "show that his [Velázquez's] status and brilliance [as an artist] have been appreciated."

Thesis 3: give Velázquez "the credit he deserved for being a loyal friend and servant."

These three ideas about the painter's intentions could be made to work together, but at present the writer is left with an uneasy fit among them. In order to resolve the tension among her possible thesis statements, the writer appears to have settled on "I think that Velázquez wants the king to give him the recognition he deserves by including him in the family." This idea follows logically from a number of the details the writer has focused on, so it is viable as a working thesis—the one that she will, in revision, test against potentially complicating evidence and evolve.

It helps that the writer has specified her *interpretive context*—the painter's intentions—because a writer's awareness of her interpretive context makes it much easier for her to decide which details to prioritize and what kind of questions to ask about them. A different interpretive context for the *Las Meninas* paper, such as the history of painting techniques or the social structure of seventeenth-century royal households, would have caused the writer to emphasize different details and arrive at different conclusions about their possible significance.

The success of analytical arguments often depends on a writer's ability to persuade readers of the appropriateness of her choice of interpretive context. And so it is important for writers to ask and answer the question "In what context might my subject best be understood and why?"

It is okay, by the way, that the writer has not concerned herself prematurely with organization, introductions, or transitions. She has instead allowed her draft to move freely from idea to idea as these occurred to her. She might not have come up with the useful ideas in paragraph 8 had she pressed herself to commit to any one idea (the divine right of kings idea, for example) too soon.

Notice that this writer has prompted a sequence of thought by using the word "interesting." Repeated use of this word as a transition would not be adequate in a final draft because it encourages listing without explicit connections among claims or explanations of how each claim evolved into the next. In an exploratory draft, however, the word "interesting" keeps the writer's mind open to possibilities and allows her to try on various claims without worrying prematurely about whether her tentative claims are right or wrong.

Step 2: Explain how the details you have focused on in the evidence lead to your working thesis.

The writer of the *Las Meninas* paper has offered at least some evidence in support of her working thesis, "Velázquez wants the king to give him the recognition he deserves by including him in the family." She notes the symbol on the painter's vest, for example, which she says might have been added later by the king to show that the painter's "status and brilliance have been appreciated." She implies that the painter's "confident stance" and "steadfast stare" also support her thesis. Notice, however, that she has not

spelled out her reasons for making this connection between her evidence and her claim.

Nor has she corroborated her claim about this evidence with other evidence that could lend more support to her idea. Interestingly, the potential thesis statements advanced in paragraph 8 are not connected with the rather provocative details she has noted in paragraphs 6 and 7: that “Velázquez dominates the painting along with the little girl,” that he “takes up the whole left side along with his gigantic easel,” and that “the king and queen are not as visible as they might be” suggesting that “they are not always at the center where everyone would expect them to be.”

In revision, the writer would need to find more evidence in support of her claim and make the links between evidence and claims more explicit. She would also need to tackle the complicating evidence that she leaves dangling in paragraphs 6 and 7, which takes us to Step 3.

Step 3: Locate evidence that is not adequately accounted for by the working thesis and pursue the implications of that evidence by repeatedly asking “so what?” Explain how and why these pieces of evidence complicate the working thesis.

This is a key step in evolving a thesis—pursuing the piece or pieces of evidence that do not clearly fit with the working thesis, explaining why they don’t fit, and determining what their significance might actually be. For this purpose, the writer would need to zoom in on the details of her evidence that she describes in paragraphs 6 and 7 and ask “so what?” about them.

- **So what** that there are size differences in the painting? What might large or small size mean?
- **So what** that the king and queen are small, but the painter, princess, and dwarf (another servant) are all large and fairly equal in size and/or prominence?

Proposed answer: Perhaps the king and queen have been reduced so that Velázquez can showcase their daughter, the princess.

Test of this answer: The size and location of the princess (center foreground) seem to support this answer, as does the princess being catered to by the ladies in waiting. But, if the painting is meant to showcase the princess, what is the point of the painter’s having made himself so large?

Another possible answer: Perhaps the small size and lack of physical prominence of the king and queen are relatively unimportant, in which case, what matters is that they are a presence, always overseeing events (an idea implied but not developed by the writer in paragraph 6).

Test of this answer: Further support for this answer comes from the possibility that we are meant to see the king and queen as reflected in a mirror on the back wall of the painter’s studio (an idea the writer mentions), in which case they would be standing in front of the scene depicted in the

painting, literally overseeing events. There isn’t much evidence against this answer, except, again, for the large size of the painter, and the trivializing implications of the king and queen’s diminution, but these are significant exceptions.

Another possible answer: Perhaps the painter is demonstrating his own ability to make the king and queen any size—any level of importance—he chooses. The king and queen are among the smallest as well as the least visible figures in the painting. Whether they are being exhibited as an actual painting on the back wall of the painter’s studio (a possibility the writer has not mentioned) or whether they appear as reflections in a small mirror on that back wall, they certainly lack stature in the painting in comparison with the painter, who is not only larger and more prominent than they are but also who, as the writer notes, “dominates the painting along with the little girl.” The little girl is the princess, herself, and the supposed subject of the painting within the painting that Velázquez is working on.

Test: This answer about the painter demonstrating his control of the representation of the king and queen seems credible. It has the most evidence in its favor and the least evidence to contradict it. The writer would probably want to choose this idea and would need to reformulate her thesis to better accommodate it, which takes us to Step 4.

Step 4: Use your analysis of the complicating evidence to reformulate the thesis. Share with readers your reasons for moving from your initial claim to this reformulation.

On the basis of the writer’s answers in Step 3, it would appear that rather than showcasing royal power, the painting showcases the painter’s own power. This idea is not a clear fit with the writer’s working thesis about the painter’s intentions, that “Velázquez wants the king to give him the recognition he deserves by including him in the family.” So, what should the writer do?

What she should not do is beat a hasty retreat from her working thesis. She should use the complicating evidence to qualify, rather than abandon, her initial idea, which did, after all, have some evidence in its favor. Good writing shares with readers the thinking process that carried the writer forward from one idea to the next.

The writer’s evolved thesis would need to qualify the idea of the painter wishing to be recognized as a loyal servant and accepted as a member of the family (which are, themselves, not entirely compatible ideas), since there is evidence in the painting suggesting a more assertive stance on the part of Velázquez about the importance of painters and their art.

The writer is now ready to pursue the next step in the revision process: looking actively for other features of the painting that might corroborate her theory. This takes us to step 5, the last step the writer would need to go through before composing a more polished draft.

Step 5: Test the adequacy of the evolved thesis by repeating steps two, three, and four until you are satisfied that the thesis statement accounts for your evidence as fully and accurately as possible. The best test of a thesis is to see how much of the relevant evidence it can reasonably account for.

The need to find additional corroboration is especially pressing for this writer because her new thesis formulation that the painting demonstrates the artist's power—not just his brilliance and desire for recognition—suggests an interpretation of the painting that would be unusual for an era in which most other court paintings flattered royal figures by portraying them as larger than life, powerful, and heroic.

It is unlikely that any thesis will explain all of the details in a subject, but a reasonable test of the value of one possible thesis over another is how much of the relevant evidence it can explain. So the writer would try to apply her new thesis formulation to details in the painting that have not yet received much attention, such as the painter's paralleling himself with the large dwarf on the other side of the painting.

This pairing of dwarf and painter might initially seem to spell trouble for the new thesis about the painter demonstrating his power to frame the way the monarchs are represented. If it was, in fact, the painter's intention to have his power recognized, why would he want to parallel himself—in size, placement, and facial expression—with a dwarf who is, presumably, a fairly low-level servant of the royal household, unlike the *meninas*, who are the daughters of aristocrats? So *WHAT* that the dwarf is paralleled with the painter?

The writer might argue that the dwarf suggests a visual pun or riddle, demonstrating that in the painter's world the small can be made large (and vice versa, in the case of the king and queen). No longer “dwarfed” by his subordinate role as court painter, Velázquez stands tall. If this reading is correct, and if it is true, as the writer suggests, that Prince Philip himself later had the honorary cross added to Velázquez's vest, we might assume that the king either entirely missed or was able to appreciate the painter's wit.

Similarly, another of the writer's key observations—that the painter “plays” with viewers' expectations—fits with the thesis that the painting asks for recognition of the artist's power, not just his loyal service. In subverting viewers' expectations both by decentering the monarchs and concealing what is on the easel, the painter again emphasizes his power, in this case, over the viewers (among whom might be the king and queen if their images on the back wall are mirror reflections of them standing, like us, in front of the painting). He is not bound by their expectations, and in fact appears to use those expectations to manipulate the viewers: he can make them wish to see something he has the power to withhold.

Step 6: Rewrite the draft into a more coherent and fuller analysis of evidence, while retaining for readers the “thesis trail”—the various steps that you went through along the way to formulating the thesis you ultimately choose.

It is tempting at the end of the exploratory writing process for the writer to simply eliminate all the ideas and analysis that did not support her final choice of thesis. Why should you include all six steps when you now know what the best version of your thesis is going to be?

Good analytical writing is collaborative. To a significant extent, good writing recreates for readers the thinking process that produced its conclusions. It shares with readers how a writer arrives at ideas, not just what the writer ultimately thinks. It takes readers along on a cognitive journey through the process of formulating and reformulating that results in a carefully qualified statement of ideas. Having made the trip, readers are more likely to appreciate the explanatory power of the most fully articulated statement of the thesis.

In a final draft, a writer can capture for readers the phases of thinking she went through by, for example, wording the thesis as a *SEEMS TO BE ABOUT X* claim (*SEEMS TO BE ABOUT X, BUT IS REALLY—OR ALSO—ABOUT Y*; see Chapter 5). This wording would allow the writer of the *Las Meninas* paper to share with readers the interesting shift she makes from the idea that the painting promotes the divine right of kings to the idea that it also endorses the power of the painter to cause people to see royalty in this light (a visual pun, as the light on the princess is actually produced by the painter's brush).

The writer could also set up a thesis that puts *X* in tension with *Y*, while granting some validity to both. In this case, *X* (the painter wanting to be recognized as a member of the family) would serve as back pressure to drive *Y* (the painter wanting to demonstrate, tongue-in-cheek, the power of painters).

In an inductively organized paper, you would begin with a working thesis somewhat closer to the final version of the thesis than was the case in the exploratory draft, but you would still take the readers along on your step-by-step journey to your conclusions. In a deductively organized paper, wherein the thesis must appear from the outset in something close to its full version, you would still be able to show your readers how your thinking evolved. The writer of the *Las Meninas* paper could do this by beginning with details that seem to obviously support the thesis (large size and prominence of the painter and his easel relative to the king and queen) and then move to details (such as the large dwarf) that readers would be less likely to connect with the thesis without her help.

Knowing When to Stop: How Much Revising Is Enough?

We emphasize before leaving this example that the version of the thesis we have just proposed is not necessarily the “right” answer. Looked at in a different context, the painting might have been explained primarily as a demonstration of the painter's mastery of the tools of his trade—light, for example, and perspective. But our proposed revision of the thesis for the *Las Meninas* paper meets two important criteria for evaluating thesis statements:

1. It unifies the observations the writer has made.
2. It is capable of accounting for a wide range of evidence.