PROBLEMATIC THESIS STATEMENTS:
AN EXERCISE

The thesis sentence is the single most important sentence in any piece of persuasive/argumentative writing. A good thesis is (in the words of writing teacher Peter Elbow) the essay's "center of gravity."

Good theses (the plural of thesis) are difficult to craft. It is all too easy to go astray. Analyze each of the following theses and determine what makes the statement problematic. Keep in mind that some theses may contain multiple flaws.

1. My subject is the incompetence of Professor Jones.

2. I want to share some thoughts with you about our space program.

3. The thesis of this paper is that it is difficult to solve our environmental problems.

4. In today's society, child abuse is an awful thing.

5. The capital of Illinois is currently Springfield; at one time, it was Vandalia.

6. Smoking damages the body.

7. Many people were saddened by the space shuttle Columbia tragedy in February.

8. I do not believe women should be treated in a sexist manner.

9. Who makes the important decisions in America's cities?

10. A seventeen inch computer monitor is easier to read than a fifteen inch monitor.

11. Life is a complicated endeavor but always a joy to experience.

12. Bruce Willis is an interesting actor who has made many movies.

13. Cell phones are becoming increasingly popular and are in use almost anywhere one goes.

14. The most important thing any maternal or paternal figure can do for human offspring is assist them in articulating the language messages they are likely to encounter in published works of literature; this is particularly important in the foundational years of existence before the offspring enters a formal educational environment.
Instructions: First, decide what problem(s) can be found in each “wannabe” thesis below. Next, rewrite the thesis in order to eliminate the problem and strengthen the thesis. (Feel free, if you wish, to write multiple versions of the thesis.)

1. Computers are found in a great many offices, homes, and schools; in fact, most people expect that they will find computers in such places.

2. I have no idea whether or not Scott Peterson is guilty of murder; it’s too early to tell whether or not the state has strong evidence against him.

3. Gerbils are 72% cuter than hamsters.

4. It is stupid for colleges to charge high tuition.

5. Officials at the U.S. Department of Justice announced a few weeks ago that law enforcement officials should view with suspicion people who are seen carrying almanacs.

6. Should people bother to make New Year’s resolutions, when research indicates that most people break them within a few weeks anyway?

7. The music business is pretty complicated.

8. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, Idaho State University at Boise, and Northern Florida University all have great majors available for students who wish to study the classic films of Adam Sandler and Pauly Shore, two men who are underappreciated yet talented actors who both suffered broken arms before the age of ten while skateboarding (blindfolded) on ice as a result of accepting a dare from their older brothers.

9. Insurance companies are up to no good; it’s that simple.

10. I think that *Smallville* is probably a pretty innovative television show.

11. People would be a lot happier if they tried to get along with their neighbors.

12. When I first got married, I used to cook three or four nights a week, but in more recent years my wife has ended up cooking dinner most nights.

http://www.siue.edu/~smoiles/theswnb.html