The Sheridan Baker Thesis Machine
This procedure is based on that originally presented in Sheridan Baker's *The Practical Stylist*.

Step 1: TOPIC
State the topic under consideration.

- cats
- freshman composition
- grades

Step 2: ISSUE
State the specific issue in the form of a debating proposition.

- Resolved: Cats should be subject to leash laws.
- Resolved: Freshman composition should be abolished.
- Resolved: Grades are unnecessary in college.

Step 3: POSITION + RATIONALE (because clause)

[=ROUGH THESIS]

Using a because clause, convert the resolution into a sentence that states your position on the issue and provides a main rationale for that position.

- Cats should be subject to leash laws because they are inveterate wanderers.
- Freshman composition should not be abolished because many freshmen are unpracticed writers.
- Grades are unnecessary in college because students learn more rapidly without them.

Step 4: POLISH & QUALIFY (although clause)

[=THESIS]

Refine the rough thesis: add any qualifications (although clauses are good for this) and consider dropping overt use of because.

- The crowded nature of city life demands that the cat's instinctive wanderlust be restrained.
- Although gifted high school graduates should be exempt from freshman composition, most entering students need help in attaining college writing skills.
- Although there may be a legitimate need to evaluate the work of college students, the traditional grading system hinders learning and stifles creativity.

Step 5: REVERSE AND TEST
Test your faith in the thesis and expose potential counterarguments by reversing your position.

- The cat's independent and adaptable nature makes it the only pet capable of living an unrestricted existence within the city.
- Although introductory composition may have remedial value for some students, most high school graduates possess writing skills sufficient for success in college courses.
- Traditional grading procedures may offend educational purists, but public school systems require pragmatic approaches to evaluation.