

Jack focuses on a particular phenomenon:

- What makes people leave everything and everyone behind and join cults?

He uses the Invention Questions on page 353 to probe for causes:

- *What state of mind or psychological need may have led to the phenomenon?* Some form of mental disease makes people join cults.

He works through his initial thoughts and discovers a less obvious cause:

- Deep loneliness and lack of purpose in life cause people to leave their families and join cults.

Jack struggles to integrate public resonance into his understanding of the cause:

- The deep loneliness and loss fostered by our hurried society create desperate searches for belonging and purpose, and cults sometimes fulfill those needs.

### ACTIVITY

Reflect on how your main idea, like Jack's, came into focus:

- What phenomenon did you focus on?
- What Invention Question(s) did you use to probe for causes?
- What less obvious cause did you discover?
- How did you integrate public resonance into your understanding of the cause?

## Common Thesis Problems

Perhaps the two most common thesis problems are psychological, striking before the writer ever touches a key or marks a paper:

1. **Fear of Ongoing Invention:** Some writers assume that thesis statements are fixed, unchangeable structures that must be strictly adhered to throughout a writing project. As they draft ideas and generate support for their initial point, they avoid asking hard questions and making new connections; that is, they fear continued invention once they've started drafting. But thesis statements are not traps. They are statements that help writers focus and intensify their thinking *as they are writing*. The human brain functions in new ways once serious writing and shaping begin; therefore, writers should allow their own writing to help them with new ideas.
2. **Fear of Commitment:** In contrast to the first fear, some writers avoid committing to a focused statement. They wander around without attempting to establish a particular idea, without digging in to a specific intellectual place. Such wandering, if it goes on too long, can lead to shallow ideas—saying lots of different things about lots of different things.