

Thesis Development

When you're writing a literary essay, you need to convey the complexity of the literature through a complex thesis statement that goes beyond the obvious and creates buds for each of your essay sections to blossom from.

Obvious: "Religion is important to Marie de France"

A little more complex: "Although religion is an important theme in some of the *Lais*, Marie seems to ignore it completely in others."

{Usually I finish writing the first draft of my analysis paragraphs at this point. Then I know what I really want to put in the thesis.}

Complex: "The absence of overt religion in several *Lais*, despite its presence in others, suggests that Marie's most important focus is on the complexity of human relationships in marriage and feudal society."

Another way to think about the process of thesis development is to move from topic through questions to a full thesis.

Topic: religion in the *Lais*

Questions: what message is Marie de France sending about religion, and how does she express it? What might explain different messages in different situations? Why is religion important in some of the *Lais* (but not in others)?

Thesis: Marie uses expressions of Christian faith as a way to demonstrate a character's sincerity but not as an external force of moral judgment.

It's really, really important that your final essay - and your thesis - can account for differences between examples and interpretations. Not everything will fit in neatly to one simple answer, and that's good - explaining how to understand some differences will make your essay more complex.