The Value of Life
Formulating a Working Thesis

Your essay’s thesis is the primary claim that you will be making about valuing life. There are several attributes of claims that form the basis of successful essays. A good claims is

1. Clear: Your reader should easily understand your essay’s claim.
2. Compelling: The claim should be interesting to your reader and should make the reader want to read your entire paper.
3. Complex: A claim that is too simple will not engage your reader and won’t contribute significantly to the “conversation” about the topic.
4. Contestable: Any claim that no one would disagree with is unlikely to be of interest to your reader.

Try writing a few claims for your essay. It might be helpful to think of you claim as a response to a specific question whose answer matters to the essay’s audience. For instance, if you are responding to Prompt #1, your claim should try to answer the question, “How should people value life in contemporary American society?” Your claim could take the form of a sentence that combines both an assertion—a statement of your opinion—and a rationale—a generalized reason in support of the assertion. Here are a couple of examples of claims that take this form:

- Schools should put more money into academics that into athletics because the primary goal of a school is to educate students, not to train athletes.
- The Star Wars films remain popular because they show the classic tale of an individual’s triumph over oppression.
- The rule of law is more important than anyone’s personal feelings because it’s the only way the ensure that everyone has the same rights in court.

Put your claim into this assertion-rationale form, you will be ready to begin drafting your essay.