Organizing the expository / argumentative essay around a thesis

The thesis guides the direction of the essay for both the writer and the reader. To create an effective thesis, it is helpful to follow these guidelines:

An effective thesis ....

- **should not** be a statement of fact
- **should not** be stated as a question
- **should not** be too broad nor too narrow in scope
- **should not** be overly complex
- **should not** be an announcement
  (e.g. “I am going to discuss three reasons why St. Xavier should build a new gymnasium.”)
- **should not** be a statement of personal preference
  (e.g. "I like foreign cars better than domestic" or "I find animated films more interesting than regular movies.") .... but thesis may be opinion supported by logical argument; in fact, many thesis statements are based on opinion.

An effective thesis ....

- **should** be arguable ... or, at least, in need of further explanation
- **should** provide direction for the rest of the paper

Note that some writing text books demand that this direction be spelled out in the thesis, but often it can be just as effective to include a word like "reasons" or "causes" or "advantages" that will provide a sense of direction without going into detail about the various areas.

Take, for example, the "historical events" topic of the war in Bosnia, a topic which needs to be narrowed and focused. One could narrow the topic by looking at the possibility of U.S. intervention in Bosnia. But the topic still needs an "argumentative edge.” So ...... add an informed opinion, one that can be supported by logic, fact, etc.

Despite the potential for bloodshed, a well-planned U.S. intervention in Bosnia could have several benefits, especially for President Clinton.

This thesis would be placed at the end of an introductory paragraph (see Rhetoric Posters for introductory paragraph technique ideas). The key word in the thesis for providing direction is obviously "benefits," with each succeeding paragraph noting a specific benefit. Some text books would have the writer spell out the "benefits" as part of the thesis, and this is an option. But unless these "benefits" can be noted succinctly, it might be better to rely on the "key word" to provide the direction.