

Develop a Thesis Statement

NHD projects should do more than just tell a story.

Every exhibit, performance, documentary, paper and web site should make a point about its topic.

X To do this, you must develop your own argument of the historical impact of the person, event, pattern or idea you are studying.

The point you make is called a thesis statement.

A thesis statement is not the same as a topic.

X Your thesis statement explains what you believe to be the impact and significance of your topic in history.

Example:

Topic: Battle of Gettysburg

Thesis Statement: The battle of Gettysburg was a major turning point of the Civil War. It turned the tide of the war from the South to the North, pushing back Lee's army that would never fight again on Northern soil and bringing confidence to the Union army.

The Thesis

What is a thesis?

The thesis is the controlling idea around which you construct the rest of your paper.

In a history paper, the thesis generally explains why or how something happened.

Every word of your paper should support your thesis.

Information you do not directly relate to your thesis will appear irrelevant.

This means, of course, that in a paper with a weak or no thesis, much of the paper will appear to be irrelevant and unguided.

How do I present the thesis?

The thesis should be contained in ^{no more than 3} ~~a~~ single sentence^s that ^{are} is concise and grammatically correct.

More than one sentence may be necessary to establish the thesis.

The thesis is a scholarly argument.

Most writing attempts to convince the reader of something. Even a poetic description of a rock is an attempt to convince the reader that the rock appears a certain way.

A history paper takes a stand on a historical issue or problem, and attempts to develop a coherent and persuasive line of thought intended to convince the reader of the validity of that stand. X
Your thesis is the concise statement of your argument.

X **A good thesis derives from a good question.**

Since the thesis is your conclusion to a scholarly argument, there must be a clear question at stake.

A thesis which does not answer a question, or answers a simple or obvious question, is not a thesis.

X You need to ask thoughtful questions of your topic and primary source material to develop a good thesis.

The best theses are good precisely because the questions they answer are significant, complex, and original.

What does a good thesis question look like?

There are many sources for questions, which lead to ^a good thesis, but all seem to pose a novel approach to their subject. X

A good thesis question may result from your curious observations X
of primary source material, as in

"During World War II, why did American soldiers seem to treat Japanese prisoners-of-war more brutally than German prisoners-of-war?"

Or, good thesis questions may challenge accepted wisdom, as in

'Many people assume that Jackson's Indian policy had nothing to do with his domestic politics; are they right?'

Finally, a good thesis question may complicate a seemingly clear-cut topic, as in

"Puritans expropriated Indians' land for wealth, but were psychological factors involved as well?"

How do I develop a good thesis?

Here is an example of how you might arrive at a strong thesis.

(1) Start with a topic,

such as discrimination against Japanese Americans during World War II. (Note that this is a very general area of interest. At this stage, it is utterly unguided. You cannot write a paper on this topic, because you have no path into the material.)

(2) Develop a question around it,

as in "why did government officials allow discrimination against Japanese Americans?"

You now have a question that helps you probe your topic; your efforts have a direction, which is answering the question you have posed for yourself.

Note that there are a great many questions which you might ask of your general topic.

You should expect in the course of your research to consider many such possibilities.

Which ones are the most interesting?

Which ones are possible given the constraints of the assignment?

(3) Develop a unique perspective on your question which answers it:

Government officials allowed discrimination against Japanese Americans not because it was in the nation's interest, but because it provided a concrete enemy for people to focus on. (This is a thesis statement. You have answered the question you posed, and done so with a rather concrete and specific statement. Your answer offers a novel and thoughtful way of thinking about the material. Once the terms of the thesis are clarified [what was the "national interest"; what was the meaning and value of having "a concrete enemy for people to focus on"?], you are on your way to a solid paper.)

NHD Summary Essay

1. Organize your notes;

Sort your note cards into piles according to similar ideas (focus questions).

Organize these piles into an order that makes sense and you want to talk about them.

Use an essay planning-web to write down your ideas.

From your web write your essay.

2. Write your essay:

First paragraph = Introduce your topic.

Give general background information.

Start broad and work to thesis.

Include what, where, when, who type info. X

Second-Fourth paragraph = These are where you explain your reasons why your thesis statement is true. Provide support for your argument.

Use details, facts, and examples from your notes.

Include the how and why info. X

Fifth paragraph = Start by rewording your thesis statement.

Sum-up your thoughts.

Bring the topic to a conclusion.

Leave your reader thinking about your essay.

* Note: If you quote someone, make sure to use quotation marks and state the person's name.

[OVER]

3. Type and save your essay:

Use standard typing font.

Use size 14 font.

Double space the document.

Set margins to: Top/Bottom = 1 inch and Left/Right = .75 inches.

Put your name(s) and English hour(s) in the top right hand corner of document.

Give your essay a title.

The title should tell the reader something about what they are about to read.

Center your title at the top of your document.