

The Development Process of a Thesis Statement (Courtesy of Minnesota History Day)

A thesis statement is a central thought that holds your entire National History Day (NHD) project together. In the beginning, we like to call this a working thesis, because as you gather your research, this thought can evolve. By the time you present your NHD project, however, you should have a concrete thesis that is supported by evidence.

Thesis = Topic + Theme + Impact. In other words, you are not just introducing your topic, you are creating an argument that expresses your topic's significance and demonstrates how the theme plays a central part.

Sample Statements: Dos and Don'ts

DISCLAIMER: Even the "DO" statements are a work in progress.

Don't: Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation.

Do: Martin Luther disagreed with aspects of Roman Catholic religious practices, especially the sale of indulgences, religious corruption, and the emphasis on salvation through good works. He took action by posting and distributing his 95 theses and left a lasting legacy by sparking a religious movement, creating a new sect of faith, and later motivating reform to the Roman Catholic Church.

Don't: Thesis: I am going to tell you about Oskar Schindler.

Do: Oskar Schindler disagreed with the persecution of the Jews and took action against the Nazi party by hiding 1,300 people in his munitions factory risking his own life and spending his fortune in the effort while sparing his workers from certain death.

Don't: Indians fought over Alcatraz Island. Why do you think they would do that?

Do: In protest over political and social discrimination, thousands of American Indians refused to compromise with government officials and reclaimed Alcatraz Island in 1969 as Indian land. Though many of the group's aims were not met their actions succeeded in spreading awareness and sparking the modern American Indian Movement, a legacy that inspires pride and action still today.

Don't: I think Susan B. Anthony did good things.

Do: Susan B. Anthony fought for women's right to vote. Through social action and her writings, Anthony inspired thousands of women and men to fight for suffrage, which eventually resulted in the 19th amendment.

Don't: Jackie Robinson was a really important black baseball player.

Do: Jackie Robinson played baseball at a time when teams were segregated, black from white. With the assistance of team manager Branch Rickey, Robinson took action, desegregating Major League Baseball as the first black ball player with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He left a legacy opening professional sports to African American athletes.

Don't: Adolph Hitler killed a lot of Jews.

Do: Following the "Great War," Adolph Hitler blamed Germany's economic and militaristic downfalls on the Jewish people. Through the use of established anti-Semitism, Hitler orchestrated the mass extermination of Jews and other "non-desirables" killing more than twelve million people and reshaping the social and cultural landscape of many European nations.

Choose a sample statement and identify:

The Individual(s): _____

The Action: _____

The Legacy: _____

What must be proven in order for this statement to be true?

What evidence will we need to support our claims?

Where might we find this evidence (consider documents, statements, opinions, and other sources)?

Consider your own working thesis and identify:

The Individual(s): _____

The Action: _____

The Legacy: _____

What must be proven in order for this statement to be true?

What evidence will you need to support your claims?

Where might you find this evidence (consider documents, statements, opinions, and other sources)?