

The Thesis Statement

A thesis statement is a central thought that holds your entire National History Day (NHD) project together. Early in the research process we like to call this a working thesis; as you gather your information, this thought can, and probably should, evolve. By the time you present your NHD project, however, you need to 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: Do's and Don'ts

Don't: Martin Luther was born in 1483. He started the Reformation. *(Fact)*

Do: In the early 16th Century there was widespread antagonism towards Roman Catholic religious practices, especially the sale of indulgences, corruption, and the emphasis on salvation through good works. Martin Luther's 95 *Theses* sparked a turning point in religious affairs in 1517. Luther's arguments succeeded in igniting a religious movement, creating a new sect of faith, and later bringing change to the Roman Catholic Church.

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

Do: American Indians under the banner of "Indians of All Tribes" were unhappy with government officials over political and social discrimination. In protest, the group reclaimed Alcatraz Island in 1969 as Indian land. Though the group's primary goals failed to reach fruition through active diplomacy, the movement became a turning point for AIM in spreading awareness to the American public and consequently ignited the modern American Indian Movement.

Don't: Had the Continental Congress voted against the 3/5 Compromise, America could have avoided a Civil War. *("What if?" history that cannot be supported with evidence)*

Do: When members of the Constitutional Convention started laying the groundwork for a new American government in 1787 debate ensued over slaves and their place in a representative government based on population. The resulting 3/5 Compromise was a turning point in ending the initial conflict because it allowed the 13 states to move forward as a unified nation. As a result of failing to come to a definitive conclusion over the issue of slavery, Constitutional framers established the United States of America with an unstable base that would continue to cause discontent until it exploded into civil war.

Don't: The 1960's presidential debate was the first to be shown on television and was really important. Want to know why? Read more below. *(Fact/Rhetorical/Incomplete)*

Do: Senator John F. Kennedy's ability to master television as a communication medium during the 1960 presidential debates helped secure him the presidency over Vice President Richard M. Nixon. Access to live, visual information shifted viewer's attention from the issues to more superficial attributes such as poise, appearance, and style, and undermined the importance and long-standing tradition of open debate. Kennedy's victory marked a turning point for political campaigning and changed the way voters understand and receive their candidates.

Don't: Adolph Hitler was an evil man that killed a lot of Jews. *(Opinion)*

Do: Following the "Great War," Adolph Hitler blamed Germany's downfalls on the country's Jewish population causing discrimination, violent action, and a mass exodus of European Jewry. In 1942 senior officials in the Nazi Party met in Wannsee, Germany to outline the strategies for the *Final Solution to the Jewish Question*. The Conference became a turning point for policies regarding the treatment German and other European Jews, leading to the deportation and eventually the extermination of more than six million Jews.

Choose a sample statement and identify:

Events leading to the turning point: _____

The Turning Point: _____

Effects of the Turning Point: _____

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:

Events leading to the turning point: _____

The Turning Point: _____

Effects of the Turning Point: _____

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)?