

The Thesis Statement

Your thesis statement is the central thought that holds your entire History Day project together.

In the beginning, you will start with a very minimal working thesis. As you gather your research, this initial idea will evolve and develop. In the end, you may be able to put your thesis into a single sentence, or you may use two or, at most, three sentences. The thesis statement will be an essential part of your introduction—if not your entire introduction.

By the time you present your HD project, you should have a well-developed, concrete thesis that is supported by evidence.

Thesis = Topic + Theme + Impact.

When you write a thesis statement, you are not just *introducing* your topic. Instead, you are *creating an argument* that expresses your topic's *significance* and demonstrates how the *theme* plays a central part.

How a thesis statement might evolve:

Ray Kroc had an impact on history because he franchised McDonald's.

Ray Kroc had an economic impact on history because he franchised McDonald's, creating the largest restaurant company in the world.

Ray Kroc had a positive economic impact on American history because he franchised McDonald's, creating the largest restaurant company in the world.

Having franchised McDonald's and thus creating the largest restaurant company in the history of the world, Ray Kroc had a positive impact on American economics but a less positive impact on American foreign relations or American health.

Think about the essays you write for social studies chapter tests. See how the outline for an essay corresponds to the outline for your NHD written work:

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| T | topic sentence | thesis statement |
| R | reason why your statement is true | paragraph that supports your thesis |
| D | developed with detail | quotations you cite |
| R | reason why your statement is true | paragraph that supports your thesis |
| D | developed with detail | quotations you cite |
| R | reason why your statement is true | paragraph that supports your thesis |
| D | developed with detail | quotations you cite |
| R | reason why your statement is true | paragraph that supports your thesis |
| D | developed with detail | quotations you cite |
| C | concluding statement | concluding paragraph |

Sample Statements: Do's 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 eventually motivating reform in 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 still inspires pride and action 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 parts:

The Individual:

The Action:

The Legacy:

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

What evidence will be needed to support the claims?

Where could you find this evidence?

Consider your own working thesis and identify the parts that are necessary for THIS year's theme:

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

What evidence will you need to support your claims? Do you have the evidence you need?

Where did you find this evidence? Or where can you look for more?

Naomi Peuse, a former Iowa state History Day coordinator, created a worksheet called "Thesis Statement Do's and Don'ts." I used that worksheet to help prepare this material.