

Guide to Thesis Development

The development of a strong thesis is one of the most critical steps in your National History Day (NHD) project. A thesis statement is the central argument or key point of your project and can make or break an entry. Therefore, you should spend a considerable amount of time working on your thesis and revising it until your thesis is strong, clear, and concise.

A thesis statement should:

- Address a narrow topic
- Be the roadmap for the rest of your project
- Explain the significance of your topic
- Makes a claim or takes a stand that you will argue in the rest of your project
- Be supported by your sources
- Connect the topic to the NHD theme
- Be clear and concisely written and easily found by the audience

Development of a Thesis

Let's look at the process of going from topic to thesis. In this example, our theme will be Rights and Responsibilities.

Roscoe Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch*.

This is a good, narrow topic, but it is not a thesis statement. It neither expresses an opinion about nor explains the significance of Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch*. Additionally, this does not express any relationship our topic has to the theme.

Roscoe Dunjee used his newspaper, the *Black Dispatch*, to advance civil rights causes in Oklahoma.

Now we are getting closer to a thesis statement. This sentence tells us that Dunjee was important because he helped to promote equality for blacks in Oklahoma and that he did so using his newspaper. However, we have still yet to take a stand. A thesis cannot simply be a statement of fact, but we need to make an argument that our project will support.

Civil rights activist Roscoe Dunjee, through the use of his newspaper the *Black Dispatch*, led the charge for equality and justice for black Oklahomans, paving the way for later advocates of African American rights.

Here is an excellent thesis statement! This sentence focuses on a narrow topic, explains the significance of that topic, clearly relates to the theme, and makes a claim that we will support for the rest of the project.

Narrow topic: Roscoe Dunjee and the *Black Dispatch*

Significance: Civil rights activist; led the charge for equality and justice

Relation to theme: Civil rights; rights of African Americans

Claim: Dunjee paved the way for later civil rights advocates

Sample Theses

Here are some examples of good, strong thesis statements.

- 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 advent of air conditioning spurred the migration of Northerners to Southern states such as Florida. This shift significantly changed the economy and culture of the South.
- Apollo 13's encounter with disaster caused NASA to realize that stronger precautions had to be taken in space exploration.
- Eleanor Roosevelt radically changed the role of the First Lady as she became the first presidential spouse to actively participate in the politics of the time. Her outspokenness, activism, and bravery forever changed the position of the First Lady from merely a supporter of her husband to a respected leader in her own right.
- Because of its challenges to the accepted standards of music, jazz transformed the traditional definitions of music and in turn, caused people to question traditional societal norms, especially during the 1920s.
- The introduction of the birth control pill provided women a way for women to have more control over family planning, which in turn revolutionized women's role in society allowing them more of an opportunity to pursue careers and higher education.

For further information on developing a strong thesis, see the links below or contact us at OkNHD. We would be glad to help!

- National History Day: What's Your Point?
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_LFIHp-61I
- Thesis Statements
<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/thesis-statements/>
- Stating Your Case: Writing Thesis Statements Effectively
<http://teachinghistory.org/teaching-materials/teaching-guides/22206>