

HISTORY DAY CALIFORNIA



Thesis Statements



Whitney Olson, NHD-CA Coordinator
Annie Olson, Menlo-Atherton High School,
NHD-CA Leadership Team

Sponsored by: CA Foundation for History Education



Agenda *

Make it Argumentative

Make it Original

Make it Thematic

NHD *Roadmap*



WE ARE HERE:

- ✓ Identify the theme
(Frontiers In History: People, Places, Ideas)
- ✓ Choose a Topic
- ✓ Craft a Research Question
- ✓ Primary & Secondary Source Research
- 📍 Thesis Statement Construction
- ...

HISTORICAL ARGUMENTATION WITH THESIS STATEMENTS

Make it
Historical



- Start with a claim and back it with reasons
- Evidence
- Respond to other views
- Explain principles of reasoning

Make it

Argumentative

Every argument is built on the answers to the same five questions:

- What do you **claim**?
- What **reasons** support that claim?
- What **evidence** supports those reasons?
- Do you **acknowledge** this alternative/ complication/objection and how do you **respond**?
- What **principle (warrant)** justifies connecting your reasons to your claim?

● ● ● **Source:** Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.



Make it



Argumentative



At the core of every NHD project:

- **Claim/Thesis** = answer to your research question
 - **Main Claim** = the statement (a sentence or more) that your whole project supports | AKA THESIS
 - **Claim** = Any sentence that asserts something that may be true or false (and so needs support)
- **Reasons** = at least two kinds of support for your claim
 - Reason = a sentence supporting a claim
 - All claims (main claim or not) need support *{more on this next time}*



Source: Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. The Craft of Research. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

CORE OF A RESEARCH ARGUMENT

1

CLAIM

because of

2

REASON

based on

3

EVIDENCE

... What's the big deal about
Responding to Alternatives?



Audiences are likely to question **any** part of your argument.

So, you have to anticipate as many of their questions as you can

CORE OF A RESEARCH ARGUMENT

1

CLAIM

I claim that ...

2

REASON

because of these reasons ...

3

EVIDENCE

which I base on this evidence ...

I acknowledge these questions, objections, and alternatives, and
I respond to them with these arguments ...

BEFORE YOUR CRAFT YOUR ARGUMENT, YOU NEED TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS

Make it
Original

- What kind of claim will you make?
- Can you state it specifically?
- Will your readers think it is significant?

Source: Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. The Craft of Research. 3rd ed. Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing and Publishing. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

... What kind of claim? 

Make it Original



Most researchers in an academic setting usually pose a **conceptual** problem



The kind of claim whose solution asks reader not do do something but to **believe** something

CATEGORIES OF HISTORICAL ARGUMENTATION

Make it
Historical



- Historical Context
- Causes & Consequences
Continuity & Change
- Historical Perspectives
Ethical Dimension
- Historical Significance

Historical Context



Definition: Using historical evidence (primary sources, and secondary sources) to establish key events and conditions relevant to particular time and events.

- **Aspects of Historical Context:**

- Engage in a research process to identify empirical facts, events and conditions
- Link background facts, events and conditions to targeted topic.

- **At the most sophisticated level, students will be able to:**

- Include events and conditions to accurately anchor topic in history
- Demonstrate understanding of how historical background affected topic
- Understand how facts, events and conditions affected the targeted topic.
- Draw on a breadth of evidence to anchor targeted topic in historical time and place.



Causes & Consequences

Continuity & Change over Time



- What was the consequence or significant event?
How did the turning point/significant event happen?
- Who was involved? How did these people become involved?
- What were the immediate results/consequences of this turning point/significant event?
- What are the causes and consequences that are hidden from view?



Historical Perspectives

Ethical Dimension



When historians take a historical perspective, they must also remain mindful of the responsibilities they have to critically analyze, discuss and remember historical events including: crimes, injustices and sacrifices. What obligations are there for historians to recall sensitive and controversial historical events?

As historians research and write history for a public audience, they must remain vigilant about what kind of historical perspective they are taking—and the ethical dimensions associated. The historian cannot avoid controversial historical events and must understand the difference between what he or she knows to be common ethical ground in contemporary society with what constituted ethics in a bygone era. Therefore, it is vital that historians are careful not to impose their own judgements using a contemporary lens on controversial events of the past.

- **What differences exist between our ethical universe (values and ideas of right and wrong) and theirs in relation to the issues involved in the topic?**
- **What are the implications for today?**



Historical Significance



Definition: The principles behind the selection of what and who should be remembered, researched, taught, and learned



- **Aspects of Historical Context:**

- **Resulting in change:** The event/person/development had deep consequences, for many people, over a long period of time.
- **Revealing:** The event/person/development sheds light on enduring or emerging issues in history and contemporary life or was important at some stage in history within the collective memory of a group or groups.

- **Your information should answer the following questions:**

- What impact did the turning point have on society, the economy, politics?
- In what ways did this turning point influence or change conditions beyond your topic?
- What is the historical significance that can be seen in current or recent events?



...Is your main claim specific? 🏹

Make it Original



Specific Language

- We are not recommending long, wordy claims **BUT** at this point, make it as richly explicit as you can.
- You can fix it later.




Specific Logic

- Introduce your claim with a clause beginning with ***although*** or ***even though***
- Conclude it with a reason-clause beginning with ***because***.

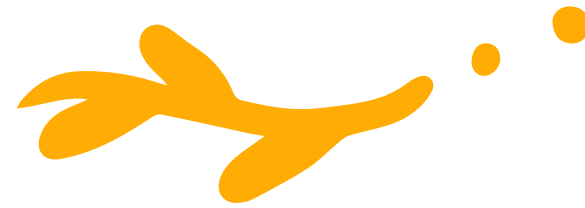
... Is your main claim significant?

Make it Original

 **"After its accuracy, readers will value most highly the significance of your claim, a quality they measure by the degree to which it asks them to change what they think."**

- Estimate the significance of your claim by determining whether readers think it might be worth contesting.
- You can gauge that by judging the apparent significance of its opposite claim.
 - **If the reverse of a claim seems self-evidently false or trivial, then most readers are unlikely to consider the original worth an argument.**

BRIEF SUMMARY OF MAIN CLAIMS/THESIS STATEMENTS



- **Directly relate to the research question**
- **Present a clear, arguable opinion**
- **Summarize, as specifically as possible, the main reasons you will use to argue your claim**
- **Link to wider issues, topic, or arguments**



A THESIS STATEMENT IS ...



- An **answer** to the research question
- A **specific, arguable** opinion
- A statement that summarizes, as specifically as possible, your **main reasons** that you will argue in the essay
- 1-2 sentences (or more for NHD)
- Something that can only be constructed after the collection of **evidence** and organizing that **evidence**. Therefore, you have to do research and a lot of it!





Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Martin Luther King Jr. helped improve
civil rights.





Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Martin Luther King Jr. helped improve
civil rights.



A simple fact or observation.



Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Martin Luther King Jr. is important to the study of US History because he impacted it.





Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Martin Luther King Jr. is important to the study of US History because he impacted it.



A rewording of the topic.



Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Martin Luther King Jr. and his
achievements had profound effects
on the US.



Let's Practice

Evaluation



Martin Luther King Jr. and his achievements had profound effects on the US.

A summary of the project.



Let's Practice *Evaluation*



In this project I will argue that Martin Luther King Jr. is an important person in US History.





Let's Practice *Evaluation*



In this project I will argue that Martin Luther King Jr. is an important person in US History.



An announcement.



Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Everyone should resist unjust rule,
just like Martin Luther King Jr. did.





Let's Practice *Evaluation*



Everyone should resist unjust rule,
just like Martin Luther King Jr. did.



A universal truth.

ABCs of

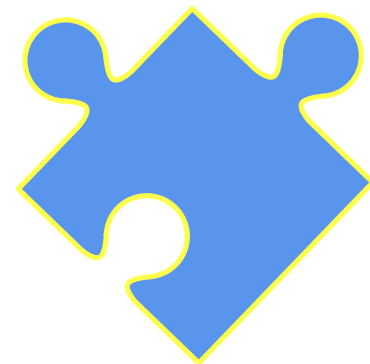
NHD



ALWAYS



BE



CONNECTING

**BACK TO THE
THEME**

Make it

Thematic

The best thesis statements include the
language from the theme

FRONTIERS IN HISTORY:

People, Place, Ideas

...

Make it

Thematic

The best thesis statements include the language from the theme

FRONTIERS IN HISTORY:
People, Place, Ideas

Including the thematic elements will ensure you're **ANALYZING historically** rather than just restating facts

...

Putting
the pieces

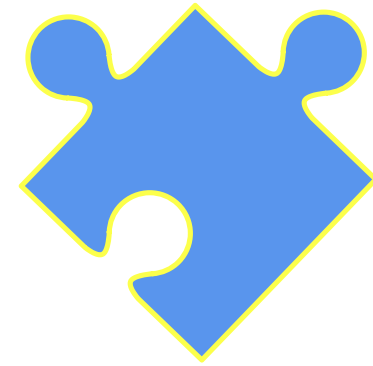
together



SECTION CLAIMS



**SIMPLE LANGUAGE
SIMPLE LOGIC**



**CONNECTION TO
THEME**

**HISTORICAL
ARGUMENTATION**

SOME SUGGESTED THESIS STRATEGIES

Break it down

Who	What	When	Where	Why	Why
Who was involved? Who was affected?	What happened? What was the main event?	Where did it take place?	When did it happen? How long of a time period was it?	Why did it happen? What caused it?	Why is it important? What were outcomes?

The Although ... Ultimately

[may not apply to all projects]

Although (counterexample), ultimately (claim responding to prompt specifying 3 examples).

Use a Formula

**X.
However, A, B, and C.
Therefore, Y.**

‘X’ represents the strongest point against your argument.
‘A, B, and C’ represent the three strongest points for your argument
‘Y’ represents the position you will be taking – your stand on the prompt.

Helpful *Language*

Simple: for example, suggests, reasons

Solid: support/proves, suggests/assumes, perspective, evidence, clearly

Sophisticated: asserts/claims, refutes, validates, therefore, moreover, challenge

...

THESIS STATEMENT REVISION



- **Does your thesis directly relate to the theme?**
- **Do you present a specific and arguable claim? If so, what is it?**
- **Do you summarize the main reasons? If so, what are they?**
- **Read your thesis out loud to yourself. Does it make sense?**

HISTORY DAY CALIFORNIA 2023



QUESTIONS

