

# Developing a Thesis Statement



History Fair projects should do more than just tell a story. Every project should **make a point** about its topic. To do this in your project, you will need to develop your own **historical argument** about the historical impact of the person, event, or idea you are studying. The point you make could also be called a **thesis statement**. A thesis statement is not the same as a topic. Your thesis statement expresses your opinion about the impact and significance of your topic. Researchers start out with a topic and a research question, but they usually don't have a thesis statement right away. Instead, they develop their thesis over time as they learn more about their topic and make judgments about the evidence they find.

A good thesis statement does **three** things:

- **Addresses a narrow topic**
- **Expresses an opinion**
- **Evaluates significance**

For a demonstration, check out the building of the thesis statement below:

## Step 1: "The Great Chicago Fire."

This is not a thesis statement yet because it doesn't address a specific, narrow issue. What will the project examine? How the fire started? The emergency response? Cows? There are thousands of topics that a historian could research about the fire. This topic needs to be narrowed quite a bit before it can be used to build a thesis.

## Step 2: "The Great Chicago Fire and Chicago Architecture."

We are making progress because this begins to narrow the topic, but it's still not a thesis. This phrase expresses no opinion and makes no argument about the significance of the fire and Chicago's architecture.

## Step 3: "Because of the Great Chicago Fire, many people in Chicago rebuilt their wooden homes and businesses with masonry and terra cotta construction."

This sentence is close to a thesis statement, but it isn't quite there yet. The researcher now shows an interpretation ("because") about the impact of the fire on building materials, but still doesn't tell us why the topic is significant in history. What effects did this change of building materials have? How did this change affect individuals and businesses in Chicago?

## Step 4: "Because of the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, many people in Chicago rebuilt their wooden homes and businesses with masonry and terra cotta construction. This rebuilding process eventually led to a distinctive 'Chicago Style' of architecture which influenced buildings and shaped skylines around the world."

We have a winner! This thesis looks at a narrow topic, expresses an opinion, and evaluates the significance of the topic. A History Fair project based on this thesis statement would discuss the new building processes and demonstrate their impact on buildings around the world.

## Testing Your Thesis

A thesis statement expresses an informed opinion. To test the strength of your thesis, think about what an opposing opinion might be. If someone could argue that your topic is not significant in history, or that it is significant for a different reason, how would you argue against their interpretation? Why is your view stronger?

To visualize and organize your ideas, try drawing a chart like this one on a piece of paper. Now consider the strength of each argument. Do you need more evidence to support your thesis statement? How will you deal with evidence that supports opposing arguments? Thinking about questions like these can help you decide what the next step in your research process should be.

My thesis:	Opposing arguments:
Evidence that supports my argument:	Evidence that supports opposing arguments:
Which argument is strongest? Why?	