Writing an Excellent Thesis Statement

You can’t win without one.

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Qualities of a Thesis Statement

• It says what your project is going to prove.
• It says something about your topic that can be argued for or against.
• It is specific, but not overly detailed.
• It addresses who, what, where, when, and why.
• It will evolve a bit as you research.
• It can be 2-3 sentences, but shouldn’t be too long.
• For 2015, it should address a quality of leadership, the impact (short-term effects), and legacy (long-term effects).
A Thesis Statement is NOT a Topic

- **Topic:** General George Meade and the Battle of Gettysburg
- **Thesis Statement:** General George Meade’s leadership of his subordinates at the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863 turned the tide of the Civil War towards the Union. Aside from the military victory, the battle provided a morale boost to the Union, creating momentum that would generate more wins for the military and help the public to sustain the sacrifices of war. Without this win at this time, the Union may have recognized the Confederacy as an independent country, thus rendering a failure this American experiment in democracy.
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General George Meade

- **Details that we would include in the project**
  - What Meade did with his subordinates
  - What morale was like before and after the Battle of Gettysburg
    - Primary sources wherein people express how they feel more hopeful after the battle
  - Opinions of Union citizens who wanted to end the war quickly
  - What people were writing or saying about the possible failure of the USA to remain a single country
Thesis Statements for Leadership & Legacy

• Topic: President Lyndon Johnson and the Voting Rights Act of 1965
• Leadership: Lyndon Johnson’s political command
• Impact: guaranteeing franchise rights to African Americans
• Legacy: realigning the political parties

• Make sure that your thesis statement reflects the long-term impact of your topic! What’s the long-term cause?
• Make sure that your thesis statement says something about the leadership, not just the leader!
President Lyndon Johnson and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

President Lyndon Johnson’s command of Congressional politics enabled him to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which guaranteed the enfranchisement rights of African Americans. Even though the legislation further alienates the traditionally Democratic white South, it secured the African American voting bloc, effectively realigning the demographics of the Democratic and Republican Parties and catalyzing an influx of African Americans into elected office.
President Lyndon Johnson and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

• What this project would go on to address
  • Description of how Johnson worked through Congress
  • Reactions of white Southerners to the new law
  • Comparing compositions of Democratic and Republican Parties before and after the law
  • Comparing African American voting patterns before and after the law
  • Comparing numbers of African Americans in elected office before and after the law
The Marshal Plan and Internationalism

In 1947, post-World War II (WWII) Europe saw the growing threat of communism and declining economies. This economic and political environment caused President Harry Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall to devise the European Recovery Plan, or ERP. The ERP was an economic stimulus program that injected over $13 billion into the struggling economies of Western Europe. This program, now referred to as the “Marshall Plan,” marked a turning point in American foreign policy. It was a reversal from post-World War I (WWI) isolationism and generated long-lasting relations with other nations.

Pivotal Politics, The Marshall Plan: A Turning Point in Foreign Aid and the Struggle for Democracy

First Place, Junior Paper

Student: Alexander Weissman
Morse Code and Modern Communication

A portrait artist in the early 1800s, Samuel F.B. Morse pursued his dream of becoming an historical painter with his “Gallery of the Louvre” only to face public scrutiny: a turning point in his life and for the world as Morse abandoned painting altogether to focus on developing his idea for the telegraph. Samuel Morse’s invention and its language Morse Code would ultimately revolutionize communication, impact wars and change the way we live today.

*Samuel F.B. Morse: Artist to Innovator, A Turning Point in Communication*

Second Place, Senior Individual Web Site

Student: Taylor Walsh
Abraham Lincoln and Southern Secession

The four-way Presidential election of 1860 was a turning point in American history. Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, John Breckinridge and John Bell vied for the White House, with incredibly high stakes. The election would decide whether the Southern way of life could continue, and whether the country would stay together or break apart. Lincoln’s victory was the last straw for many Southerners. Although the Republican Party’s platform called only for halting the spread of slavery into new territories, Southerners feared that the new President would abolish slavery entirely. Before Lincoln was even sworn into office, seven states decided to secede from the Union, bringing on a terrible war that would forever change America.

_On the Brink of Disunion: The Election of 1860_

First Place, Senior Individual Web Site
Student: John Vodrey
Let’s try one together.

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Hints for NHD 2015

Have between 20-30 primary sources and 20-30 secondary sources.
Use a variety of sources: music, political cartoons, diaries, interviews, oral histories, newspaper articles, encyclopedias, maps, videos, etc..
Interview an expert. University professors are usually glad to help.
Go to an archives at least once!
Include the short-term and long-term impacts!
Talk about the leadership.
Include the context. What other relevant things are happening in the world?
Be sure that your project expresses the significance of your topic.