

### Research Paper Thesis Proposal

Respond to the corresponding assignment prompt on Blackboard with a paragraph that describes your thesis.

What distinguishes Art History papers from the papers you might be asked to write in other courses? Perhaps the biggest difference creates the biggest challenge: in Art History papers, you must be able to create an argument about what you see. In short, you have to translate the visual into the verbal. To do this you must be familiar with visual language and various art historical methodologies.



Gerhard Richter, *Deck Chair II*, 1965.

Second - and perhaps most important - you need to not only describe what you see, but to craft your description so that it delivers some argument or point of view. A good art history paper will not simply offer a haphazard description of the elements of a painting, sculpture, or building. You must consider what it is you want to say about a work of art and use your description to make that point. As well, you must be able to utilize the art historical methodologies to support your ideas and give credibility to your arguments. In short, you must master the art of simultaneously analyzing and describing the work of art you have chosen to discuss.<sup>1</sup>

A good thesis statement will usually include the following four attributes:

- take on a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree
- deal with a subject that can be adequately treated given the nature of the assignment
- express one main idea
- assert your conclusions about a subject

### Steps to Building a Strong Thesis

*Brainstorm the topic.*

Let's say that your class focuses upon the problems posed by changes in the dietary habits of Americans. You find that you are interested in the amount of sugar Americans consume. You start out with a thesis statement like this: Sugar consumption.

This fragment isn't a thesis statement. Instead, it simply indicates a general subject. Furthermore, your reader doesn't know what you want to say about sugar consumption.

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<sup>1</sup> from Dartmouth's guide to writing an art history paper - <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~writing/materials/student/humanities/arhistory.html> © 2010 Trustees of Dartmouth College

*Narrow the topic.*

Your readings about the topic, however, have led you to the conclusion that elementary school children are consuming far more sugar than is healthy. You change your thesis to look like this: Reducing sugar consumption by elementary school children.

This fragment not only announces your subject, but it focuses on one segment of the population: elementary school children. Furthermore, it raises a subject upon which reasonable people could disagree, because while most people might agree that children consume more sugar than they used to, not everyone would agree on what should be done or who should do it. You should note that this fragment is not a thesis statement because your reader doesn't know your conclusions on the topic.

*Take a position on the topic.*

After reflecting on the topic a little while longer, you decide that what you really want to say about this topic is that something should be done to reduce the amount of sugar these children consume. You revise your thesis statement to look like this: More attention should be paid to the food and beverage choices available to elementary school children.

This statement asserts your position, but the terms *more attention* and *food and beverage choices* are vague.

*Use specific language.*

You decide to explain what you mean about *food and beverage choices*, so you write: Experts estimate that half of elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar.

This statement is specific, but it isn't a thesis. It merely reports a statistic instead of making an assertion.

*Make an assertion based on clearly stated support.*

You finally revise your thesis statement one more time to look like this: Because half of all American elementary school children consume nine times the recommended daily allowance of sugar, schools should be required to replace the beverages in soda machines with healthy alternatives.

Notice how the thesis answers the question, "What should be done to reduce sugar consumption by children, and who should do it?" When you started thinking about the paper, you may not have had a specific question in mind, but as you became more involved in the topic, your ideas became more specific. Your thesis changed to reflect your new insights.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Produced by Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN  
[http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis\\_statement.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml)