

Research Paper Thesis Proposal

You are asked to spend a healthy portion of this semester developing a research project relevant to our course of study. Your paper should begin with a clearly stated purpose. Your purpose may be to investigate the career of a single artist, consider the development of a particular movement in contemporary art history, or to explore a specific art historical issue/theory. Whichever you chose, your thesis should establish a point of view from which you will visually describe and analyze a minimum of four relevant works of art (see Barnett Chapter 1). The analysis that you develop must make skilled use of the art historical methodologies as outlined in Barnett Chapter 12 and the Introduction to *Art Since 1900*. As well, your thesis should be well supported by a minimum of five CMS footnotes from five different, credible, scholarly sources.

“What distinguishes Art History papers from the papers you might be asked to write in other

On Blackboard, submit a paragraph to the Research Paper Thesis assignment prompt that proposes an artist, movement, issue, theory, or other area of exploration relevant to the study of contemporary art from 1970 to the present day that you would like to investigate in your research paper. Please consult the Research Paper Topic Suggestions on the class Assignments page for help choosing a relevant topic. Outline the questions you intend to explore and the debates you would like to investigate. If you are new to the subject of interest, evaluate what draws you to this topic and what you anticipate you will discover by exploring it further.

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. Perhaps most importantly, 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.

Writing a Thesis

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.

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 relies on vague language.

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 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?" Though you began with the fragment of an idea, as you became more involved in the topic, your thesis changed to reflect your new insights.¹

¹ Produced by Writing Tutorial Services, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN
http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/thesis_statement.shtml