

Narrowing Your Topic

When beginning a National History Day (NHD) project, students often think of a general historical period they are interested in, such as World War II. While this is a good starting point, students ultimately need to choose a very specific subject to focus on. Many History Day students struggle to narrow their broad starting topic, instead using it as their final topic. The problem is that a general subject is far too broad to explore in depth. This document will help you to take a general area of history and develop a narrow, focused topic.

First, let's look at some examples of narrowed topics.

Interest: Fashion

General Topic: American Women's Fashion

Narrow Topic: Fashion of American Women in the 1920s

- First, narrowed by focusing on subset of people (women) and geography (US)
- Second, narrowed by time period (1920s)

Interest: The Civil War

General Topic: Battles

Narrow Topic: Battle of Honey Springs

- First, narrowed by looking at the military aspect of the war (battles)
- Next, narrowed by looking at a specific battle (Battle of Honey Springs)

Interest: American Indians

General Topic: Treaty Rights

Narrow Topic: 1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty

- First, by looking at a political aspect (Treaty Rights)
- Second, narrowed by looking at an individual issue (1788 Fort Schuyler Treaty)

Interest: Women's Rights

General Topic: Suffrage Movement

Narrow Topic: Mary Church Terrell

- First, by looking at a political aspect (women's suffrage)
- Next, by looking at an individual person (Mary Church Terrell)

Interest: World War II

General Topic: D-Day

Narrow Topic: Role of Jake McNiece and the "Filthy Thirteen"

- Military operation (D-Day)
- Specific subset of people (Jake McNiece and the "Filthy Thirteen")

Interest: Ships

General Topic: Titanic

Narrow Topic: Class Structure Onboard the *Titanic*

- Individual ship (Titanic)
- Social structure (class structure on the Titanic)

Interest: Space

General Topic: NASA

Narrow Topic: Women in NASA

- Specific organization involved in space (NASA)
- Gender in the organization (women in NASA)

Interest: American History

General Topic: Abraham Lincoln

Narrow Topic: Abraham Lincoln and the Homestead Act

- Political leader (Abraham Lincoln)
- Individual law promoted by Lincoln (Homestead Act)

In the next two examples, we will show how you can form multiple narrow topics from the general topic.

Interest: American History

General Topic: Dust Bowl

Narrow Topic: Dust Bowl in Boise City

Dust pneumonia

Okie migration

- Specific event in American history (Dust Bowl)
- Specific geographical region (Dust Bowl in Boise City)
- Medical consequences of event (dust pneumonia)
- Social consequences (Okie migration)

Interest: Technology

General Topic: Industrial Revolution

Narrow Topic: Income Changes Resulting from Industrial Revolution

Child Labor

Advent of the Cotton Gin

- Specific time period of technological advancement (Industrial Revolution)
- Economic consequences (income changes resulting from Industrial Revolution)
- Social consequences (child labor)
- Individual technological advancement of event (advent of cotton gin)