

## Narrowing Your Topic

When beginning a National History Day (NHD) project, students often think of a general area of history that 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 on which to focus. Many History Day students struggle to come up with a narrow topic, instead using their broad beginning topic. The problem with this is that a general subject is far too large to explore completely. 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:

**1. 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)

**2. 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)

**3. 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)

**4. 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)

**5. 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")

**6. Interest:** Ships

**General Topic:** Titanic

**Narrow Topic:** Class Structure Onboard the *Titanic*

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

**7. Interest:** Space

**General Topic:** NASA

**Narrow Topic:** Women in NASA

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

**8. 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.

**9. 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)

**10. 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)