Formulating a Research Question

Use the following guiding questions (or one of your own) to write a central question that will be the focus for your paper.

1. Why were particular people, events, or ideas significant or influential?
2. How did particular people, events, or ideas affect other people, events or ideas?
3. Why did some factors cause a change to subsequent events or ideas?
4. Why did some factors enforce continuity of existing events or ideas?
5. Why did some people or groups respond to historical change the way they did?
6. How do historians view historical people, events and ideas differently? On what basis (evidence) are some explanations for historical change more persuasive than others?
7. Why are particular ethical judgements of historical people, events, or ideas more persuasive than others?

Writing a Thesis Statement

A good thesis statement is formed by answering a “Why” or “How” question. Be sure that your thesis is clear and defensible using solid historical evidence. Avoid a thesis statement that is too general or too obvious to the reader.

A Weak Thesis Statement
World War II was fought in Europe between 1939 and 1945.

A Slightly Better Thesis Statement
World War II resulted from Germany’s aggressive foreign policy.

A Strong Thesis Statement
Germany’s aggressive foreign policies, designed by the Nazi government in the 1930’s to counteract the adverse effects of the Treaty of Versailles on the German economy, were the primary factors that led to the outbreak of World War II.