History Essay: Writing the Thesis Paragraph

Your thesis paragraph should open with a statement about your general topic, continue with sentences that narrow down the topic, and conclude with your thesis. For a 5-8 paragraph paper, the introduction will be one paragraph; for a longer paper, the introduction will be two or three paragraphs.

1. **Opening sentences:**

   In 1994, in less than 100 days, over 800,000 Tutsi and Tutsi sympathizers were massacred in Rwanda. The daily kill rate was five times that in Nazi death camps. Bodies were everywhere.

   This statement introduces the paper topic: the Rwandan genocide of 1994.

2. **Narrowing sentence:**

   No one was safe from the killers, yet nothing was done by the international community to help these people.

   The author narrows her focus from the Rwandan genocide in general to the failure of the rest of the world to stop the killing.

3. **Thesis statement:**

   Rwanda was the first case that the UN responded to by retreating from its commitment, allowing the genocide to happen—genocide, which the world said would never happen again.

   This is the author’s central argument. She will devote the rest of her essay to providing evidence that the international community allowed the Rwandan genocide of 1994 to happen.

**DO** give your essay a title that draws your reader in, such as “International Failure and the Rwandan Genocide.”

**DO** make sure your thesis is an argument rather than a simple statement of fact. In this case, for example, someone else could argue that the UN did all it could to prevent the Rwandan genocide and simply failed.

**DON’T** ever use the thesis paragraph to make general statements about history, society, or human nature. For example, People have been killing each other since the dawn of time.