



Theme Letters

Purpose of a Collector Theme

A collector theme statement should demonstrate that the applicant is seeking to establish and maintain a genuine firearms collection based on a clearly defined historical, technical, cultural, military, law enforcement, sporting, manufacturing or educational subject.

The theme should explain:

- what is being collected;
- why it is being collected;
- how individual firearms contribute to the collection; and
- what criteria determine whether a firearm belongs within the collection.

The purpose of a theme statement is not to provide a list of firearms the applicant wishes to acquire. It is intended to demonstrate a structured and coherent collecting objective.

Characteristics of a Strong Collection Theme

A well-developed collection theme should:

Be Clearly Defined

The theme should identify a specific collecting area.

Examples:

- Australian military firearms issued between 1901 and 1945.
- Firearms designed by John Moses Browning between 1890 and 1935.
- The development of Olympic target pistols from 1948 to 2000.
- The evolution of pump-action shotgun mechanisms.
- Firearms manufactured by Lithgow Small Arms Factory.

Applicants should avoid themes that are so broad that they encompass a substantial proportion of all firearms.

Have Clear Boundaries

A collector should be able to explain:

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- What firearms fit within the theme.
- What firearms fall outside the theme.

A theme should have identifiable limits, such as:

- historical period;
- manufacturer;
- country of origin;
- technical design;
- military conflict;
- law enforcement agency;
- patent or mechanism; or
- recognised historical significance.

Demonstrate Historic or Artistic Value or Mechanical Uniqueness

Applicants should explain:

- the historical significance;
- technological importance;
- manufacturing development;
- military or law enforcement relevance;
- sporting significance; or
- cultural importance

of the firearms being collected.

The focus should be on preservation, research and study.

Explain the Relationship Between Firearms

The collection should have a logical connection.

For example:

The purpose of this collection is to document the evolution of service pistols adopted by Australian police agencies from 1900 to the present day.

In this example, each firearm contributes to illustrating the development of police sidearms over time.

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Information Applicants Should Include

Applicants should consider including:

Collection Objective

A statement explaining:

- why the collection is being developed;
- what knowledge or history is being preserved; and
- what the applicant hopes to study or document.

Historical Background

A brief explanation of the theme and its significance.

Representative Examples

Examples of firearms that may fit within the theme.

Examples should not be presented as a wish list.

Applicants should explain:

"This model is relevant because..."

rather than simply naming firearms they wish to acquire.

Research Resources

Applicants should identify:

- books;
- reference publications;
- museums;
- collectors' associations;
- archive material; and
- academic or historical sources

used to support their studies.

Record Keeping

Applicants should explain how they intend to:

- catalogue their collection;
- maintain historical records;

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- document provenance; and

preserve collected items.

Common Deficiencies in Theme Statements

Applications may be considered deficient where:

The Theme Is Too Broad

Examples:

- Modern firearms.
- Military firearms.
- Sporting firearms.
- Pistols of historical interest.
- Firearms of unusual design.

These descriptions are often too broad and may encompass an excessively large range of firearms.

The Theme Is a Shopping List

A theme statement should not simply consist of:

- lists of desired firearms;
- extensive model lists;
- broad manufacturer lists; or
- categories of firearms the applicant wishes to own.

The emphasis should be on the collection theme rather than the firearms sought.

Multiple Unrelated Themes Are Combined

Applicants should avoid combining numerous unrelated themes into a single collection rationale.

For example:

- service pistols;
- target pistols;
- concealable firearms;
- presentation firearms; and
- hunting rifles

may each represent separate collecting interests but may not form a coherent collection when combined.

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The Purpose Is Ownership Rather Than Collecting

The statement should demonstrate:

- study;
- preservation;
- documentation;
- research; and
- historical or technical interest.

Applications that primarily justify firearms based on use, desirability or ownership preferences may not adequately demonstrate a collector purpose.

Questions Applicants Should Ask Themselves

Before submitting a collection theme, consider:

1. What is the specific focus of my collection?
2. Why is this subject historically or technically significant?
3. What are the boundaries of the collection?
4. What firearms are clearly excluded from the collection?
5. How does each firearm support the theme?
6. Does the statement describe a collection, or merely firearms I would like to acquire?

If the statement cannot clearly answer these questions, further refinement may be required.

How the Registry Assesses Collection Themes

The Registry will consider whether the proposed theme:

- has a clear and specific collecting focus;
- has identifiable boundaries;
- demonstrates a genuine collecting purpose;
- has historical, technical, cultural, educational, military, law enforcement, manufacturing or sporting significance;
- allows individual firearms to be linked to the stated theme; and
- is supported by appropriate research, study or preservation objectives.

A theme may not be accepted if it:

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- is excessively broad;
- consists primarily of a list of desired firearms;
- combines unrelated collecting interests;
- appears to be directed towards firearm ownership rather than collecting; or
- lacks a clear and logical connection between the proposed firearms.

Linking Firearms to the Theme

A collector should be able to explain how each firearm acquired under the licence contributes to the stated collection theme.

When developing a theme, applicants should consider:

- Why does this firearm belong in the collection?
- How does it support the collection objective?
- What historical, technical, cultural or educational significance does it have within the theme?
- Would a reasonable person be able to understand why this firearm belongs in the collection and another similar firearm does not?

A collection theme should allow individual firearms to be assessed against the stated collecting objective.

Key Principle

A collector theme should demonstrate a genuine and structured collecting purpose. A strong theme defines and limits the collection. A weak theme simply identifies firearms the applicant wishes to acquire.

Note - Approval of a collector theme does not automatically authorise the acquisition of every firearm that may arguably fall within that theme. Each application will be assessed against the requirements of the Firearms Act and any other relevant legislative criteria.