PAPER CATEGORY
JUDGING CRITERIA AND RULES

Revised January 2022

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a judge for the National History Day® (NHD) contest. Our young historians have labored for months preparing their entries and are eager to share their historical research and conclusions.

THE NHD FRAMEWORK AND STUDENT JOURNEY

NHD asks students to select a topic connected to an annual theme. Students research their topic using primary and secondary sources, analyze its significance in history, and share their conclusions through one of five project formats. Students may work alone or in groups of up to five. Students may enter their work into a progressive competition cycle, moving from school to regional, affiliate, and national contests. As students advance, they can revise and improve their work based on judges' feedback.

PURPOSE OF JUDGING

NHD's goal is to provide young people with a high-quality educational experience—whether or not they win a prize. Your role is to help us achieve this goal through your interactions with the students. Together we succeed or fail based on the quality of the learning experience.

THE JUDGING PROCESS OVERVIEW

Every NHD contest is managed by a **Contest Coordinator** who is responsible for implementing NHD contest procedures. Always defer to your Contest Coordinator's guidance. As a judge, your responsibilities include:

1. Reviewing all materials sent to you in advance of the contest.
2. Participating in judges' orientation(s).
3. Reviewing several entries and completing required evaluation forms.
4. Reaching consensus and finalizing winners with other members of your judging team.

GREET *(In-person contests only)*

Greet the students and **briefly explain** the judging process. A smile goes a long way to set them at ease!

Note: To ensure student safety, NHD does not hold interviews at virtual contests.

READ

Review the **process paper** and **annotated bibliography**. **Keep one copy** for your judging team to refer back to during your deliberations.

VIEW

You likely will have thoroughly reviewed the **paper** entries in advance.

INTERVIEW *(In-person contests only)*

Ask the students **questions about their project, research, or topic**. This is a chance for students to share their understanding, though it is not to be an oral presentation. The interview does not weigh heavily in your evaluation.

Do not offer suggestions for improvement during the interview. Take notes to include in your written feedback, which students receive after the contest.

EVALUATE AND RANK

Return to the judging room to **discuss** entries, **evaluate** using the rubric, **achieve consensus**, **rank** entries, and **select top entries** to move forward.

WRITE

You and your team members each will **complete an evaluation form for each entry**. Your written feedback is the most valuable for student learning. Checkmark placement does not need to be identical, but should be similar to those of your co-judges.

PARTS OF AN ENTRY

All student entries contain three required parts. *See the Required Written Materials on Page 7 for more information about process papers and bibliographies.*

- **Process Paper:** A 500-word description of the research process.
- **Annotated Bibliography:** An annotated list of all sources consulted.
- **Project:** Projects are divided by division (Junior, 6-8 grade, or Senior, 9-12 grade), type (Individual or Group, 2- 5 students), and category (Documentary, Exhibit, Paper, Performance, or Website)

PAPER BASICS

Papers are a written format for presenting a historical argument, research, and interpretation of a topic's significance in history. The paper must be an original creation and grammatically correct.

- **Between 1,500 and 2,500 total words.** Counted words include both student-composed and quoted material appearing in the text of the paper, but not footnotes/endnotes or appendix material.
- **Citations required.** Students must include either footnotes, endnotes, or in-text citations in one of the approved styles (Chicago Manual of Style or MLA).
- **Appendices optional.** Many students will choose to include additional support materials in an appendix. These materials should directly connect to the paper and should not include extensive supplemental materials.

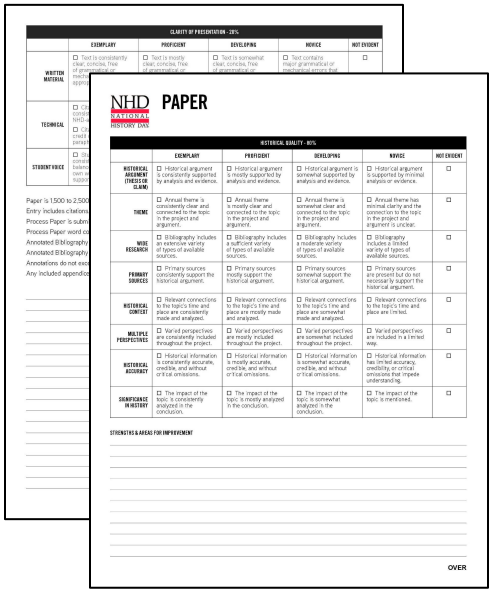
STUDENT INTERVIEWS *(In-person contests only)*

The interview is **your opportunity to clarify your understanding** of the content and development of an entry while enabling students to gain valuable communication skills. Students may not give a formal, prepared introduction, narrative, or conclusion. Your team must guide the interview. Ultimately though, an entry must be able to stand on its own without additional commentary and the interview is not evaluated, unless you learn something critical about the students' understanding of their topic.

Student Safety: To ensure student safety, do not ask personal questions (school, age, etc.), take photos of students, or be alone in a room with a **student.**

ENTRY EVALUATION

You will use a two-page rubric-based form to assess each entry. Whether your Contest Coordinator asks you to complete it online or in-person, **the same form is used at all levels of National History Day competitions**. Please do not devise your own system or assign points to determine top entries.


NHD NATIONAL HISTORY DAY

PAPER

HISTORICAL QUALITY - 80%

	EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	NOVICE	NOT EVIDENT
HISTORICAL ARGUMENT (THESIS OR CLAIM)	☐ Historical argument is consistently supported by analysis and evidence.	☐ Historical argument is mostly supported by analysis and evidence.	☐ Historical argument is somewhat supported by analysis and evidence.	☐ Historical argument is supported by minimal analysis or evidence.	☐
THEME	☐ Annual theme is consistently clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	☐ Annual theme is mostly clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	☐ Annual theme is somewhat clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	☐ Annual theme has minimal clarity and the connection to the topic in the project and argument is unclear.	☐
WIDE RESEARCH	☐ Bibliography includes an extensive variety of types of available sources.	☐ Bibliography includes a sufficient variety of types of available sources.	☐ Bibliography includes a moderate variety of types of available sources.	☐ Bibliography includes a limited variety of types of available sources.	☐
PRIMARY SOURCES	☐ Primary sources consistently support the historical argument.	☐ Primary sources mostly support the historical argument.	☐ Primary sources somewhat support the historical argument.	☐ Primary sources are present but do not effectively support the historical argument.	☐
HISTORICAL CONTEXT	☐ Relevant connections to the topic's time and place are consistently made and analyzed.	☐ Relevant connections to the topic's time and place are mostly made and analyzed.	☐ Relevant connections to the topic's time and place are somewhat made and analyzed.	☐ Relevant connections to the topic's time and place are limited.	☐
MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES	☐ Varied perspectives are consistently included throughout the project.	☐ Varied perspectives are mostly included throughout the project.	☐ Varied perspectives are somewhat included throughout the project.	☐ Varied perspectives are included in a limited way.	☐
HISTORICAL ACCURACY	☐ Historical information is consistently accurate, credible, and without critical omissions.	☐ Historical information is mostly accurate, credible, and without critical omissions.	☐ Historical information is somewhat accurate, credible, and without critical omissions.	☐ Historical information has limited accuracy, credibility, or critical omissions that impede understanding.	☐
SIGNIFICANCE IN HISTORY	☐ The impact of the topic is consistently analyzed in the conclusion.	☐ The impact of the topic is mostly analyzed in the conclusion.	☐ The impact of the topic is somewhat analyzed in the conclusion.	☐ The impact of the topic is mentioned.	☐

STRENGTHS & AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

OVER

PARTS OF THE EVALUATION FORM

Levels of Achievement (Column headers) - These are used to label columns, not used to evaluate an entry!

Judging Criteria (Left column) - These are the elements you will evaluate in each project.

Descriptors (Text in boxes across each row) - These identify the key characteristics you will look for in each criterion.

Written Comments (Bottom of both sides of the printed form) - This is space to provide strengths and areas for improvement for each entry.

Rules Compliance (Yes/No questions on the second page) - These are category-specific requirements for projects.

HISTORICAL QUALITY: 80%

Historical Quality assesses the project's research, analysis, interpretation of the topic, and relationship to the annual theme. There are eight criteria, each carrying equal weight, and **are the same for all categories.** These terms are defined in the **NHD Judge Glossary**.

- **Historical Argument:** The use of analysis and evidence to support the historical argument
- **Theme:** The clarity and connection of the topic to the theme in the project
- **Wide Research:** The use of a variety of types of primary and secondary sources
- **Primary Sources:** The support that primary sources give the argument. They may include, but are not limited to first-hand accounts of the topic such as letters, speeches, diaries, contemporary newspaper articles, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, and artifacts.
- **Historical Context:** The relevant connections the student makes to the topic's time and place
- **Multiple Perspectives:** The integration of different perspectives into the project
- **Historical Accuracy:** The accuracy, credibility and lack of critical omissions in historical information
- **Significance in History:** The analysis of the impact of the topic in history

PAPER CLARITY OF PRESENTATION: 20%

This area of the evaluation relates to how well the student used the project to convey their ideas. Be careful—do not be carried away by glitz. Simpler is often better. Conversely, do not discount an entry or assume students had outside assistance simply because a project is of high quality.

- **Written Material:** Text is clear, concise, free of grammatical or mechanical errors, and appropriate to the topic.
- **Technical:** Citations are written in an NHD-approved format. Citations credit quotations and paraphrased information.
- **Student Voice**: The student's ideas are clear and balanced with supporting evidence, such as quoted material from primary or secondary sources.

HOW TO USE THE RUBRIC

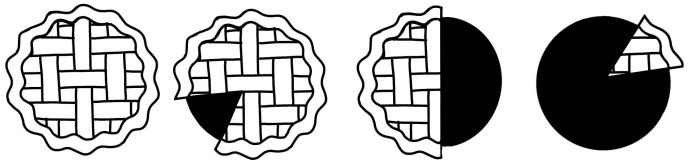
For each criterion (e.g., historical accuracy, theme, etc.), compare the same elements across the levels of achievement. The key words in the descriptors (**consistently, mostly, somewhat, and limited/minimal**) indicate the strength of those elements in the project. Together, the descriptors create a spectrum, from consistently to not evident. Pick the statement that best represents the project's strength in each criterion.

A project's rating for a criterion is determined entirely by the strength of the project against the rubric, not against any other projects. ***Do not adjust a rating for a project based on the other entries you view.*** Ranking is a separate process.

- **All checkmarks do not need to be in the same column for the whole rubric** (e.g., all exemplary, or all proficient). They will likely vary across different criteria.
- **The checkmarks should be consistent, though not necessarily identical, across the judge team**. Please ensure consistency during your team discussions. Inconsistency will be confusing to students.

WHICH DESCRIPTOR ON THE FORM IS MOST APPROPRIATE?

Selecting the right descriptor is not about picking an exact match. **Pick the descriptor that is most true** and use your written comments to provide additional explanation. Think about it like pie. Within a single criterion, you are **not comparing different things**. Your question is not, "is this cherry or apple pie?"



Consistently Mostly Somewhat Minimal/ Limited

You **are comparing the same thing and trying to determine how much of it is in the project**. The descriptors provide a progressive range of options.

For a given criterion, you know that it's apple pie. Your question is, **"How much apple pie is in the pan?"**

EXAMPLE: THEME CRITERION

For the annual theme criterion, you will consider the theme connection's **clarity** (how well-presented the theme connection is) and **strength** (how well-connected the topic is to the theme).

*Notice the **key words in the descriptors** that change across the row.*

	EXEMPLARY	PROFICIENT	DEVELOPING	NOVICE	N/E
Theme	□ Annual theme is **consistently** clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	□ Annual theme is **mostly** clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	□ Annual theme is **somewhat** clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.	□ Annual theme has **minimal** clarity and the connection to the topic in the project and argument is unclear.	□

The theme connection is completely clear and well connected to the topic in the project and argument.

There is a theme connection, but there are one or more major problems with the connection or the way it's presented.

Not evident

RANKING ENTRIES & SELECTING TOP ENTRIES

Evaluating each project against the rubric and ranking all the entries you view are two different, yet related, parts of judging.

- **Evaluating each entry** is based solely on the strength of the specific project against the criteria.
- **Ranking the entries** is done by conferring with your judging team to compare and contrast the entries. The entries that advance should generally have higher ratings than those that do not. Your Contest Coordinator will let you know how many top entries your team will select and the process for turning in your results.

Determining the strongest projects can be more difficult when ratings are similar. When this happens:

- Remember that Historical Quality is 80% of the evaluation. Which entry is strongest in these criteria?
- Aside from the rubric, which entries do you feel are strongest and why? Does the rubric support this?

WRITING FEEDBACK

Both pages of the evaluation form provide space for comments, including about strengths and areas for improvement. Please write positive, constructive comments that will help the student(s) understand why you evaluated the entry as you did. Always be mindful that you are writing to young learners. Your feedback will help them to improve not just this project but their approach to research and presentation for a lifetime.

The key to History Day judging is to provide positive, but critical, evaluations of each entry. Constructive commentary is valuable for:

- Students who are advancing, who want to know how they can improve their work
- Students who are NOT advancing, who want to understand why

Instead of...	**Consider...**
• Find more primary sources. • Needs stronger argument. • Project lacks focus.	• **Providing specific ideas.** *Try finding more primary sources - such as newspapers from the time period, or accounts from survivors.* • **Giving specific suggestions.** *Strengthen your argument by going beyond just stating the facts - how did the bombing of Pearl Harbor change military history?* • **Thinking about the age of your audience.** *Your topic covers a lot of time in history. Consider focusing on one event in WWII, instead of the entire war. You could dig deeper and make a more specific argument about impact in history.*

CONTEST RULES

Students and teachers must follow the *NHD Contest Rule Book*, June 22, 2020 Edition. The rule book breaks down the judging criteria described above and provides parameters to enable an apples-to-apples comparison for evaluation. While you are welcome to read the rule book (http://www.nhd.org/rulebook), the following instructions contain the essential information you need. In this section, black text is based on what students find in the rule book; suggestions to you in applying the rules are in red.

RULE INFRACTIONS

Rule infractions occur if students violate any of the rules stated in the Contest Rule Book. Failure to comply with the rules will count against the entry. Rule infractions are not grounds for disqualification, except as noted below in the Disqualification section. However, judges will consider rule infractions in their final rankings. Infractions specific to the category are explained later under Category Rules. Not all rule violations are treated the same:

Minor rule infractions are those that do not confer a competitive advantage. Examples include putting the school name on the title page; exceeding time, word, or size limits by a small, inconsequential amount; or using inconsistent citation formats. Please mark these as violations on the evaluation form and note them as Areas for Improvement. However, treat them with some leniency. While one or two minor infractions should not keep an entry that is the best in its category from advancing to the next contest level, part of your task is to comment upon these so that students can address them. At all levels, if two entries are otherwise equal in quality, the entry with fewer violations should be ranked higher.

Major rule infractions are those that give a substantial advantage over other entries. Examples include significantly and consequentially exceeding time, word, or size limits, or having someone else operating equipment or designing part of the entry. Major infractions should result in lower rankings, and those entries should not advance to a final round or the next contest level. If your judging team feels that an entry with major infractions should advance, please consult your Contest Coordinator.

DISQUALIFICATION

Disqualification is the removal of an entry from the competition. Only the Contest Coordinator has the authority to disqualify an entry. A project may be disqualified for the following reasons related to academic integrity:

1. Entering a project in multiple contests or entry categories within a contest year.
2. Reusing, individually or as a group, a project (or research from a project) from a previous year.
3. Plagiarizing (stealing and passing off another's ideas, words, or production as one's own; not crediting a source).
4. Tampering with or removing any part of another entry during a competition.

These reasons are the only grounds for disqualification.

If you feel an entry has a reason to be disqualified, please contact the Contest Coordinator.

GENERAL RULES

Contest Year: NHD projects must be completed during the contest year, which begins immediately after the preceding year's National Contest has concluded.

Entry: Students may participate in the research, preparation, and presentation of only one entry each year. Revising or reusing an entry from a previous year—whether a student's own or another student's—is unacceptable and will result in disqualification.

Individual Entries Only: Students in the paper category may participate as individuals only.

Annual Theme: An entry must relate to the annual theme and explain the topic's significance in history.

- While entries must relate to the annual theme, students often do not need to address every aspect of the theme. For the theme *Rights and Responsibilities,* students could examine rights OR responsibilities; they do not have to include both, though one often leads to the other.
- Consider whether a topic is only tangentially or questionably related to the theme. "Pickett's Migration at the Battle of Gettysburg" for the theme *Migration in History* is quite a stretch.

English and Translations: All entries must be submitted in English unless otherwise approved by the Contest Coordinator. If students use other languages, they must provide English translations. For word count, judges will count only the English translation.

Copyright: The Fair Use doctrine allows for educational use of copyrighted materials for noncommercial purposes. Students are advised not to place their projects in a nonacademic public setting, such as a commercial internet site.

Reasonable Help: Students are responsible for the research, design, and creation of their entry. They may receive help and advice from teachers and parents on the mechanical aspects of creating their entry, such as typing a paper and other written material. They may seek guidance from teachers as they research and analyze their material, but their conclusions must be their own. Students may have reasonable help in preparing their projects. Examples of reasonable help include:

- A teacher provides guidance about research and analysis.
- A technology instructor shows students how to use documentary editing software.
- A teacher reviews student work and offers editing suggestions.
- A parent carries equipment into the contest space.
- A trusted adult is copied on communication with interviewees and accompanies the student to an interview.

Always ask the student(s) or Contest Coordinator if you are concerned about whether adult assistance has exceeded acceptable levels and given an unfair advantage, using open-ended questions such as, "How did you create your project?"

Supplying Equipment: Students must supply all props and equipment that a Contest Coordinator does not provide.

Costumes: Only students competing in the performance category may wear costumes related to their entry during judging.

Prohibited Materials: The following items are not allowed in any competition venue: (1) weapons of any kind (real, toys, or replicas), (2) live animals (except service animals), (3) live cultures or organisms, and (4) anything that can cause damage to the competition venue.

Interview with Judges: Students must be prepared to answer judges' questions about the content and development of their entry. They may not give a formal, prepared introduction, narrative, or conclusion during the interview. Judges must guide the interview, and the entry must be able to stand on its own without additional commentary.

REQUIRED WRITTEN MATERIAL FOR ALL ENTRIES

Formatting of Written Materials: All NHD entries must include written materials presented in the following order: (1) title page, (2) process paper, and (3) annotated bibliography. Students must print written materials on plain white 8.5 x 11-inch paper, with 1-inch margins on all sides, in 12-point font. A4 paper is accepted from international affiliates. Written materials may be single- or double-sided and must be stapled in the top left corner.

Local contests may have unique submission requirements, but written materials are generally provided to judges in print form in the exhibit, documentary, performance, and paper categories. In the website category, students upload their written materials within the site. Your Contest Coordinator will let you know how you will access student materials.

Title: The entry must have a clearly visible title on the title page and the project itself.

Title Page: A title page is required as the first page of written material in every category. The title page must include only the title of the entry, the name(s) of the student(s), the contest division and category, and applicable word counts.

Process Paper: All NHD projects must include a process paper. The process paper must be 500 words or fewer and must not include quotes, images, or captions. The process paper words are counted separately and are not part of the project word counts in papers, exhibits, or websites. Students must address the following questions in their process paper:

1. How did they choose their topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?
2. How did they conduct their research?
3. How did they create their project?
4. What is their historical argument?
5. In what ways is their topic significant in history?

- The process paper should not be a summary of the students' research.
- Students do not have to subdivide their process paper into labeled sections for each question.
- All words in the process paper count toward the 500-word limit.

Annotated Bibliography: An annotated bibliography is required for all categories. Students must:

1. List all sources consulted in developing the entry.
2. Combine photos or other materials from the same collection into a single citation.
3. Separate the bibliography into two sections: one for primary sources and one for secondary sources.
4. Not attach primary or secondary materials to the annotated bibliography.
5. Not include the annotated bibliography in the word count.

Each citation must include a brief annotation. The purpose of the annotation is to provide information about the research process. Annotations must not be more than two or three sentences that explain how the student used the source and how it helped them understand the topic. Students may use annotations to explain their reasoning for classifying sources that are not clearly primary or secondary.

- If you have questions about how a source is categorized, ask the students or Contest Coordinator.
- A stray comma or a single misplaced source in an otherwise strong bibliography is a minor concern. However, for students who misunderstand bibliography fundamentals or make the same mistake routinely, your feedback is instructive. If bibliographical errors make it difficult to assess the quality of the research, they may affect the entry's ranking or evaluation.
- Words in the title page and annotated bibliography are not included in the word count.

Style Guides: Citations and bibliography references must follow the most recent edition of one of the two permitted style guides below. The style must be consistent throughout all written material.

1. *The Chicago Manual of Style* by the University of Chicago Press
2. *MLA Handbook* by the Modern Languages Association of America

CATEGORY RULES: PAPERS

Paper Elements: Papers are a written format for presenting a historical argument, research, and interpretation of a topic's significance in history. The paper must be an original creation and grammatically correct.

Length Requirements: The text of historical papers must be no less than 1,500 and no more than 2,500 words in length. Each word or number in the text of the paper counts as one word. This includes student-composed text, quotes from primary or secondary sources, interpretive captions, and words in notes other than the citation. The following words are not included in the word count: title page, process paper, annotated bibliography, footnotes/endnotes/internal documentation citations, and primary source materials in appendices. If relevant images, maps, graphs, or primary source materials are included, they must be placed in appendices, referenced in the text of the paper, and cited in the annotated bibliography. However, appendices should be limited.

- If you suspect a paper exceeds the word limit or does not meet the minimum, please count the words to be certain. You may use a built-in word counter in a program such as Microsoft Word, noting that, while Microsoft Word counts a date (e.g., December 7, 1941) as three words, NHD counts it as one word.
- If a paper exceeds the word limit by a few words and does not confer a competitive advantage by providing an opportunity to include additional information or interpretation, consider it a **minor rule infraction** and note it on the evaluation form.
- If a paper exceeds the word limit, allowing enough extra words to include additional information or interpretation, consider it a **major rule infraction**. Major infractions should result in lower rankings, and those entries should not advance to a final round or the next contest level.

Citations: Citations—footnotes, endnotes, or internal documentation—are required. Citations are used to credit the sources of specific ideas as well as direct quotations. Students may use either MLA or Chicago Manual of Style citation style, as long as they are consistent throughout the paper.

Preparation Requirements: Papers must be printed on plain, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper, double-sided, in 12-point font, with 1-inch margins on all sides. A4 paper will be accepted from international affiliates. Pages must be numbered consecutively and double-spaced. The materials should be combined in the following order: (1) title page, (2) process paper, (3) paper (with notes), and (4) annotated bibliography. Papers must be stapled or clipped in the top left corner and should not be enclosed in a cover or binder.

- Failure to adhere to the preparation requirements is a **minor rule infraction** that you should note in your comments. This can be fixed easily and does not provide a qualitative advantage.
- If a paper does not comply with the preparation requirements but your judging team believes that it is otherwise the best, you may choose to advance it to the next level.

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