

GUIDE FOR CREATING A TOP-NOTCH HISTORY DAY ENTRY

History Day judges will pay close attention to the following six elements of your History Day contest entry:

- Analysis and Interpretation
- Significance and Impact
- Substantive Research
- Historical Accuracy
- Historical Context
- Adherence to the Theme

Follow the advice that follows to put your best foot forward at any History Day contest.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

History Day judges always look for high-quality analysis and interpretation. Through your presentation, written materials, and answers to questions, you should show your judges you have developed your own conclusions about your historical topic. One key argument or thesis should be clear in your work.

Use the other five keys to History Day in order to show your analysis and interpretation!

SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPACT

Make sure your entry emphasizes how history was changed or affected because of the subject you have studied. It is a good idea to make *significance and impact* a part of your thesis statement—the main point you want your audience to take from your presentation.

RESEARCH

Judges always look for in-depth research into primary and secondary sources.

- If primary sources are available on your topic, then you have a responsibility to track them down.

- You also need a solid base in secondary sources.
- Demonstrate that you have researched and understood alternative perspectives, even if you do not agree with them.

HISTORICAL ACCURACY

If you have completed detailed research, it will not be hard to make your entry historically accurate. But be careful to avoid making hasty generalizations that are not based on research. If you refer to other periods of time in your presentation, make sure what you say is fact, not just your assumption.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

If you can make it clear how your topic fits into the historical time period, your conclusions about your topic's significance will be stronger, and your presentation will have a greater impact on your audience. How did the political, social, cultural, and intellectual atmosphere during the time period affect your subject?

ADHERENCE TO THE THEME

Even when the connection between your topic and the History Day theme seems obvious, you should make a clear and explicit effort to tell the judges how your subject relates to the theme.

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OTHER HELPFUL HINTS

- **Proofread all written materials painstakingly!!!!**
Misspellings and grammatical errors are a chronic problem for History Day entries! After you think you have caught all the errors, have a parent or teacher go over the materials again.
- **Check with the experts.** When you feel you have completed a good draft of your entry, show it to your teachers, historians, museum curators, or other experts you have encountered during your research, and ask for more advice. Then, make some changes to improve your project.
- **Check with people who are unfamiliar with your project.** Present your History Day entry to several people (including relatives or other students) to get their feedback on how you could improve. Be sure to ask if there are any spots where they get confused and if they understand your main points.
- **Practice your answers to judges' questions.** Practice in front of your teacher, parents, historians, or others. It

will help you avoid the jitters and offer articulate and meaningful responses when the real time comes!

- **Review National History Day contest rules.** Make sure your project adheres to them. For example, make sure your dramatic performance is no longer than the allotted time in the rule book.
- **Emphasize substance over style.** In preparing your History Day entry, remember that content is what is most important. Don't get carried away with glitz.
- **Carefully prepare your annotated bibliography.** Include in your annotation of primary materials a description of why you considered the source to be primary. It will help you avoid misplacing sources, and will help judges understand why you considered the source to be primary.
- **Rehearse.** Check out your presentation site or do a dress rehearsal before the real thing. It will help you avoid last-minute catastrophes and you will appear more confident.

Other Helpful Hints adapted with permission from Iowa History Day.

History Day is not a contest about rules. It is a contest about learning.

—Cathy Gorn,
National History Day

THE POWER OF DIRECT QUOTES

Definition: A direct quote is the actual words of a person. People often use a direct quote to provide evidence and support for what they have written. Using a direct quote can make your topic seem more real. Quotes can make a person come alive for the reader.

- Skill-steps:**
1. Find a quote that provides evidence or helps to explain what you have written.
 2. Decide if you will use the entire quote or only part of it. You may want to only use the part of a quote that applies to what you have written. If you decide to only use part of the quote, you must indicate that something has been taken out by the use of three dots (. . .). The three dots might come at the beginning if you took something off the beginning, in the middle if something was taken off there, or at the end if something was left off at the end.
 3. Give credit to the writer of the quote by putting his name after the quote or by including a sentence before the quote that says that the person "stated" or "said"—and then include the quote.
 4. Use quotation marks or italicize the quote to show that it is a direct quote.

Example:

General writing

During World War II the Allies invaded the beaches at Normandy, France, in an attempt to gain a foothold on the Continent. The invasion actually took place on June 6, 1944, and was met by stiff German resistance.

Quote

"On D-Day, we had no idea what to expect. We went in ships that carried about 300–400 people. The bow would open up and you would just take off ... We had to debark in the water and go straight ahead for the shore. There were bodies all around. Even if they were alive you couldn't stop to pick them up, you just had to keep going."

— Leo Blaskowski, World War II veteran.

QUESTIONS JUDGES MIGHT ASK

The following are sample questions. These are not inclusive of the questions that judges might ask during the National History Day judging interview.

1. What was your most important source, and why?
2. What is the most important point you are trying to convey about your topic?
3. What is the most important thing you learned from completing this entry?
4. Why did you pick this topic? What gave you the idea to do this topic?
5. As you did your research, what surprised you the most about this topic?
6. What did you find most difficult about doing the research for this entry?
7. How did your primary sources help you understand this topic?
8. How did you come up with the script or design for your entry?
9. Why did _____ (the person or people who are the subject of the entry) get involved in _____ (whatever they got involved in)?
10. If you researched an individual, what were the biggest obstacles faced by this person?
11. If you researched an event, what were the most important factors that caused this event to occur?
12. What were the most important consequences of this _____ (event or person's actions)?
13. Why is this topic significant in history?

INTERVIEW WITH THE JUDGES

Before

- Go back and read over all your notes, sources, and other materials.
- Read each annotation in your bibliography again. Study your sources.
- Plan which key ideas you want to stress to the judges.
- If you feel especially nervous, you might consider preparing note cards with your key ideas, but you probably won't need them.
• You know your topic!

During

- Introduce yourself and shake hands with the judges.
- Give the judges the paperwork right away.
- Be polite at all times.
- Show your excitement and enthusiasm during the interview.
- Remember that you are an EXPERT on your topic.
- If the judges ask you a question, and you don't know the answer, tell them what you do know: "I'm not sure about that, but I do know . . ." or "I will have to look into that . . ."
- When the judges ask you a question, don't just answer with a YES or NO. ELABORATE!
- Make sure all partners have a chance to answer the judges' questions. Do some of the talking. (It's good to plan out ahead of time what part of the interview each partner will talk about.)
- HAVE FUN!
- Thank the judges when you are done! Shake hands again!