



DOCUMENTARY CATEGORY: JUDGING CRITERIA AND RULES

Revised January 2021



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 with you.

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.

YOUR JUDGING PROCESS

Each contest has its own unique personality. Regardless of the format a contest takes, judges still follow the same basic process. Your judging responsibilities include:

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

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.

JUDGING CRITERIA

NHD REVISED THE JUDGING CRITERIA AND EVALUATION FORMS IN JUNE 2020.

The most significant change is the implementation of a rubric on the evaluation forms. As illustrated in the example below, each criterion includes four rating categories, each containing one or more judging elements, as well as a “not evident” option. The advantages of this rubric format include:

- Lists judging guidelines in each rating category, making it easier to evaluate an entry objectively.
- Provides for consistency between judges by presenting specific evaluation guidelines.
- Allows judges to select a different rating category for each element included in the criterion.

| Historical Quality - 80% | | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| | Superior | Excellent | Good | Fair | Not Evident |
| Historical Argument | <input type="radio"/> Well-formulated historical argument supported by thorough analysis | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Historical argument supported by some analysis | <input type="radio"/> Basic historical argument supported by basic analysis | <input type="radio"/> Weak historical argument with little or no analysis | <input type="radio"/> Not Evident |
| | <input type="radio"/> Annual theme woven throughout the project | <input type="radio"/> Annual theme addressed in the project | <input checked="" type="radio"/> Annual theme mentioned in the project | <input type="radio"/> Annual theme connection is unclear | <input type="radio"/> Not Evident |

Judges' evaluations are an essential part of the NHD educational experience. You will use these to evaluate specific judging criteria and offer thoughtful and constructive comments. You and your judging teammates will each complete one evaluation form for each entry. These forms have two pages:

- Page 1, Historical Quality (80% of the overall evaluation), including space for comments addressing strengths and areas for improvement. Historical Quality is the same for all entry categories.
- Page 2, Clarity of Presentation (20% of the overall evaluation), including rules compliance and space for general comments. Clarity of Presentation varies by entry category.

Note: Please find the revised Documentary Evaluation Form at <https://www.nhd.org/sites/default/files/NHDEvaluationFormsRnd1Doc.pdf>

Historical Quality – 80%

Historical Quality assesses the project's research, analysis, interpretation of the topic, and relationship to the annual theme. It is divided into eight criteria, with each carrying equal weight.

- **Historical Argument** evaluates (1) how well analysis supports the historical argument and (2) how well the annual theme is incorporated into the project.
- **Wide Research** evaluates the variety and integration of credible primary and secondary sources.
- **Primary Sources** evaluates how well primary sources—first-hand accounts of the topic such as letters, speeches, diaries, contemporary newspaper articles, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, and artifacts—support the argument. Note: Primary materials, when found in secondary sources, are not considered primary sources.
- **Historical Context** evaluates the integration of short-term and long-term causes—intellectual, political, social, or cultural—of the historical event.
- **Multiple Perspectives** evaluates how well multiple perspectives (e.g., those who benefited and those who suffered, or those who supported and those who opposed) are integrated into the historical argument.
- **Historical Accuracy** evaluates the accuracy of the historical information provided.
- **Significance in History** evaluates (1) how well the conclusion about the topic's significance in history is supported by research and (2) how well short-term and long-term impacts are presented.
- **Student Voice** evaluates the presence and effectiveness of student ideas, analysis, argument, and conclusions conveyed through the student's own words, not relying on sources to speak for them.

Clarity of Presentation – 20%

This area of the evaluation relates to the entry's production quality. 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 documentary is of high visual and production quality; many students achieve superior production quality and superior historical quality.

Entries in the documentary category have two Clarity of Presentation criteria, each carrying equal weight:

- **Audio and Visuals** evaluates (1) the impact of the audio and its clarity and ease of understanding and (2) the appropriateness and impact of the visual sources.
- **Technical** evaluates (1) the quality of the narration (Is it articulate? Does it contain grammatical or mechanical errors?), (2) the quality of the visual sources (Are they clearly focused?), and (3) the volume of the audio components.

Rules Compliance

Rules compliance addresses required elements and varies by category. You will find yes/no questions covering rules compliance elements after the Clarity of Presentation section on the evaluation form. Please use the comment space that follows to explain, if necessary.

Comments

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.

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 or boundaries 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.

Application:

- Not all 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 rated 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.
- **Infractions specific to the documentary category are explained later under Category Rules.**

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.

Application:

- The reasons listed above 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 or Group Entries: Students in the documentary category may participate as individuals or in a group of two to five students. All students in group entries must be involved in the research and interpretation of the group's topic.

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

Application:

- 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.

Application:

- 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.

Application:

- 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?

Application:

- 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.

Application:

- 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: DOCUMENTARIES

Documentary Elements: A documentary is an audiovisual presentation that uses multiple source types such as images, video, and sound to communicate the student's historical argument, research, and interpretation of the topic's significance in history. It must be an original production.

Time Requirements: Documentaries may not exceed ten minutes in length. Timing begins when the first visual image appears, or the first sound is heard, whichever occurs first. Timing does not include time used to test sound or video. Timing ends when the last visual image or sound concludes, including

source credits. Students have up to five minutes to prepare the documentary for presentation, adjust volume, etc. Following the documentary presentation, students have five minutes to remove their equipment and participate in an interview with judges.

Application:

- If a documentary exceeds ten minutes by a few seconds 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 documentary exceeds ten minutes, allowing enough extra time 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.

Introduction: Students must announce only the title of their presentation and the names of participants. Live narration or additional comments before or during the presentation are prohibited.

Student Involvement and Operation: Students must provide, open, and run the file containing the documentary. Once the documentary begins, it must run on its own. No interaction of any kind with judges or the audience is allowed. Judges are not permitted to run the equipment. NOTE: Students may be given reasonable assistance with technical problems beyond their control.

Entry Production: Students must create and produce the entry. They must operate all equipment, including recording and editing equipment, used in production of the documentary. Only the student participant(s) may write and narrate the documentary script. Only the student(s) and the person(s) being interviewed may appear in the documentary. Using materials created by others specifically for use in the documentary is prohibited. Students may use preexisting professional photographs, film, recorded music, etc., in the documentary, with source credit.

Application:

- While students may have assistance in learning how to operate editing equipment and software, they must operate the equipment/software themselves. Failure to do so constitutes a **major rule infraction** and should result in a lower ranking and non-advancement to the next level.
- Any items created specifically for the entry must be the students' work.

Source Credits: The last portion of the documentary must be a list of acknowledgments and credits for sources of moving footage, interviews, music, and images that appear in the documentary. These source credits must be brief—not full bibliographic citations and not annotated. Items found in the same collection must be included together in one credit. The list of source credits is included in the ten-minute time limit. They must be readable. Students must cite in the annotated bibliography all sources (e.g., music, images, film/media clips, interviews, books, websites) used to make the documentary.

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