

10 Tips for Creating a Spectacular NHD Paper



Find Your Voice

Using the right tone in your paper will make your paper as professional and polished as it can be. Your History Day paper is a type of formal writing, so use a formal voice and style for your paper. ***the way U rite sez alot 2 ur reader***. Don't use slang, informal abbreviations, jargon, or offensive language. Think about the mechanics and look of good writing: grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling and well formed paragraphs. Look at historical books or articles for models.

Focus on the Writing

In the paper category, your words are all you have to convey your argument and analysis to the judges. A well structured argument will go a long way to convey your ideas to the judges. You will likely have much more to say than you can include in just 2,500 words. You are going to have to think critically about what information is most relevant to your paper. Decide what evidence most effective in establishing your thesis. In doing this, you will likely create multiple drafts of your paper before you are ready for your first competition.



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Polish Your Work

Putting an extra polish on your work is especially important in the paper category. Since papers are read before the day of the competition, judges will likely look over your work multiple times. In addition to asking others to help you with proofreading, it's a good idea for you to proof your paper from a printed copy, not just on the computer screen where it is much easier to miss errors. In addition, try reading your paper aloud. Sometimes your eyes don't notice a mistake until your ears tell you that something isn't right.

Prepare in Advance

National History Day papers are submitted before the competition, usually with your registration materials. The version of the paper that you submit in advance is the final version that judges will use for the competition. Judges will already have read your paper by the time you come to the competition. This means that you will have to be finished with your final product about two weeks before the competition. Make sure that your timeline for completing a paper includes this variable.



The Interview is Important

Just because the judges have already read your paper doesn't mean that the interview is unimportant. The judges will use the interview to answer questions they had about your paper, analysis, research, etc. The interview is also your chance to clarify your argument and show off all your hard work for the judges.

The Paper Stands Alone

When evaluating NHD papers, judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in your paper itself. The paper has to stand on its own. Have someone who has never seen your paper look at it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc.). Without saying anything, let them read through the entire paper. Then, ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my paper? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my paper? What is confusing to you?

What are the Qualities of a Good Historical Paper?

The qualities that a judge is looking for in your NHD paper are written right on the evaluation sheet. Listed below is the same criteria judges will use to evaluate your paper. After you create your paper, go through this list and ask yourself if you've met the criteria or incorporated the following elements into your project.



Historical Quality – 80% (At 80%, the historical quality of your paper is by far the most important part!)

- My paper is historically accurate:** All the information in my paper is true to the best of my knowledge and supported by my evidence and research.
- I show analysis and interpretation:** My paper doesn't just recount facts or tell a story. I interpret and analyze my topic. My paper has a strong central thesis or argument that I prove. I can point to where I state my thesis in my paper.
- I place my topic in historical context:** My topic didn't take place in isolation. I made sure to place my topic into historical context – the intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting for my topic.
- My project shows wide, balanced research and I used available primary sources:** These ideas all relate to the research behind your NHD paper. Judges will look carefully at your bibliography to learn more about your research process. They want to see that you investigated multiple perspectives about your topic and to see that you looked at all sides of an issue. They are looking for research using both primary and secondary sources and to see that you used a variety of source types.
- I clearly relate my topic to the theme:** My theme connection is clear in my paper itself.
- I demonstrates significance of my topic in history and draw conclusions:** My paper does more than just describe my topic. I explain why my topic is important in history or demonstrate its significance.
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Clarity of Presentation – 20%

- My paper and written materials are original, clear, appropriate, organized, and well-presented:** I have an organized and well-written paper. I was careful to avoid plagiarism.
- My paper text is clear, grammar and spelling are correct and my entry is neatly prepared:** I have double-checked spelling and grammar in my paper, and bibliography. I have been careful to follow the NHD requirements in formatting my paper.
- My paper contains citations in an NHD-approved format:** I have consistently and correctly credited all quotations and paraphrased information.



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