
IV. How Will Your Entry Be Judged?

A. Benefits of the Evaluation Process

The goal of National History Day is to provide you with a high-quality, educational experience—whether or not you win a prize. The judges' evaluations are part of the learning and skill building process of NHD. The judges' evaluations help you to improve skills and provide positive feedback for the hard work you have put into producing your project. The judges' comments also can provide you with ideas for revisions and enhancements as you move from one contest level to the next. Remember, regardless of how your entry is ranked, by participating in National History Day you will benefit from the experience. You will gain research, thinking, and presentation skills that will last your entire life. You will become an expert on a topic of interest to you and to others. You will acquire poise and self-confidence and will learn to manage your time. You are a winner!

B. Who are the Judges?

Historians, educators, and others interested in history and education serve as judges at each level of the National History Day competition.

C. How Does the Evaluation Process Work?

At official National History Day contests, each separate division and category usually is judged as a whole by a panel of judges. Time constraints due to the number of entries often require some categories to be evaluated initially by several teams of judges. Finals then become necessary. In such cases, the entries judged best by each team of initial judges are re-evaluated by a new team of judges to determine the winning entries in the category. The number of entries in finals and procedures for judging vary by contest and category and are within the discretion of the contest officials.

D. Consensus Judging

Judges will not assign a numerical score to each entry; rather, they will rank the entries in their group. Judges are required to consult with each other in determining individual rankings. Judges are encouraged to review the results of their category upon completion of the judging to assure accuracy in the evaluation process. As a final step, the judges will assign each entry an overall rating.

E. The Subjective Nature of Judging

Remember: judges must evaluate certain aspects of your entry that are objective (e.g., were primary sources used; is the written material grammatically correct and accurately spelled). But judges also must evaluate interpretive aspects of your entry that are qualitative in nature (e.g., analysis and conclusions about the historical data). Historians often reach different opinions about the significance of the same data. It is therefore crucial for you to base your interpretations and conclusions on solid research. Judges will check to determine whether you used available primary sources and whether you were careful to examine all sides of an issue and present a balanced account of your research and presentation. Your process paper and annotated bibliography are critical to this process.

F. The Decision of the Judges is Final

You, your parents, and your teachers should realize that inadvertent inequities may occur in judging and that contest officials do want to be informed of any problems. If you have a concern, ask your teacher about the correct process to follow in notifying officials. The decision of the judges is final.

G. Evaluation Criteria

Historical Quality (60%)

The most important aspect of your entry is its historical quality. You should ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on your historical analysis.

- Is my entry historically accurate?
- Does my entry provide analysis and interpretation of the historical data rather than just a description?
- Does my entry demonstrate an understanding of historical context?
- Does my annotated bibliography demonstrate wide research?
- Does my entry demonstrate a balanced presentation of materials?
- Does my entry demonstrate use of available primary sources?

Relation to Theme (20%)

Your entry must explain clearly the relation of your topic to the annual National History Day theme. You should ask yourself the following questions to help focus your topic on the theme and its significance.

- How does my topic relate to the theme?
- Why is my topic important?
- How is my topic significant in history and in relation to the National History Day theme?
- How did my topic influence history?
- How did the events and atmosphere (social, economic, political, and cultural aspects) of my topic's time period influence my topic in history?

Clarity of Presentation (20%)

Although historical quality is most important, your entry must be presented in an effective manner. You should ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on your presentation.

- Is my entry original, creative, and imaginative in subject and presentation?
- Is my written material clear, grammatically correct, and accurately spelled?
- Is my entry well-organized?
- Do I display stage presence in a performance?
- Is the visual material I present clear?
- Do I understand and properly use all of my equipment?

H. Rule Compliance

Judges will take into consideration in their final rankings any rule infraction. Failure to comply with the rules will count against your entry. Rule infractions should be corrected before a winning entry competes in the next level of competition.

I. Sample Judge's Evaluation

Below are sample NHD project evaluation forms. Teachers or fellow students can use these forms to help evaluate your project as you work to improve your entry. Blank forms can be found on the NHD web site at www.nhd.org.

