

The Vermont Historical Society Presents

# VERMONT HISTORY DAY



STUDENT  
RESEARCH GUIDE

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This student guidebook is designed to provide an introduction to the History Day program. Experienced History Day Coordinators have selected and developed the materials and strategies included in this guide.

If you have specific questions about History Day, please contact your Vermont History Day Coordinators:  
**[vermonthistoryday@gmail.com](mailto:vermonthistoryday@gmail.com)**

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# History Day Road Map

## “A Snapshot”

### Step 1: Choose Your Topic

- Be clear on how your topic connects to National History Day’s annual theme.
- National History Day considers your topic to be historical if the topic occurred at least 20+ years ago
- Choose a topic that interests you so that you will **want** to keep working on the project.



### Step 2: Do Your Research

- Remember: historians are like detectives who discover the past.
- Make it easier on yourself. Track your sources as you go.
- Start by finding at least 5 secondary sources.
  - Read up on your topic using credible secondary sources before you start searching for primary sources.
  - Look for articles and books that were created by experts.
  - Evaluate every website you use.
- Find at least 10 primary sources on your topic. For some topics you can find hundreds of primary sources, so find as many as you can.
  - Use a variety of sources. Historians don’t just rely on the internet. They use books, articles, interviews, historic newspapers and magazines, letters, diaries, photos, maps, paintings, video clips, advertising, propaganda, laws, court cases, etc.



- Conduct balanced research.
- Investigate various points of view, understand all sides of an issue, explore conflicts and debates.
- Dig deeper!
  - If possible, interview someone who was there.
  - Find even more sources.

# History Day Road Map

## Step 3: Analyze and Synthesize Sources

- Analyze your sources and think about what the sources show the reader/audience.
- Consider the ways your topic relates to the theme.



- Summarize the historical context.
  - What events led up to your topic?
  - How does your topic relate to the political, social, cultural circumstances of the time?
- Identify significance.
  - What changed?
  - What were the short-term and long-term consequences?
  - Why does this matter?

- Draw conclusions based upon the historical evidence you have found.

## Step 4: Develop a Thesis or Claim

A strong thesis statement guides your audience to understand your research and findings

- Explain what happened accurately.
  - Who, what, where, when, why, how?
- Contemplate and include multiple perspectives.
- Discuss historical significance and impact.



**Once you complete your research, you get to construct your argument. An argument (also called a thesis or claim) is the case that you make.**

## Step 5: Create, Improve, and Finalize Your Project

- Re-check the NHD Rule Book.
- Write your Process Paper.
- Create a Title Page.
- Make your Annotated Bibliography.

# Annual Theme

**NHD's annual theme will help you think more deeply about your topic.**

- Start by learning about the theme ideas.
- Then look for a topic that intrigues you and that has strong connections to the theme.

## 2025 annual theme: Rights and Responsibilities in History

**The key to this theme is addressing BOTH rights AND responsibilities.**

**These are two powerful forces in history, but one does not work without the other.**

To study rights and responsibilities in history, we must ask questions. Who decides who has rights? Does everyone have the same rights? Who decides on the limits individuals should or should not have? Why? What led to establishing certain rights, and to whom were they given? How have people, governments, or institutions decided what parameters should be set to enforce responsibilities? How are such decisions justified?



## How do I pick a topic?



### A good NHD topic:

- Relates to the annual theme
- Happened 25+ years ago
- Is focused/isn't too broad
- Has plenty of primary and secondary sources available and accessible to you
- Is historically significant
- Matters to you

### Want to “level up” a topic:

- Take a different angle on something familiar
- Examine a local aspect of a larger story

## Topic Resources

- NHD Theme Book:
  - <https://nhd.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NHD-2025-Theme-Book-FINAL.pdf>
- National History Day MN Novice Topic List:
  - [https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/node/12066/topic\\_novicelist.pdf](https://www.mnhs.org/sites/default/files/node/12066/topic_novicelist.pdf)
- NHD Vermont History Explorer:
  - <https://vermonthistoryexplorer.org/nhd-topicresources/>

# What Topic Interests You?

## Where do I start?

Topic selection is an important step for your project. Set yourself up for success by spending time on this important step. Choosing the right topic can “make or break” your History Day experience.

### Start With Big Ideas of Interest

What is a general area of history you find interesting? It may be related to family history, or maybe you heard something from a friend. Is there something that you read or watched that made you think about history differently? Use the chart below to brainstorm a topic in an area of history that interests you. Think about how it relates to the theme.



Circle the areas of history that interest you.

Don't see a general topic category of interest? Add your ideas to the empty boxes.

African History	American West	Vermont History	Government/ Policy	Environment
Social Movements	Education	International Relations	Asian History	Reform
Science/ Technology/ Medicine	Indigenous History	South/Central America	Civil Rights	European History
U.S. History	Sports	Women's History	WWI / WWII	Arts/ Popular Culture
Recreation/ Tourism				

# Narrowing Your Topic

## Find your “Goldilocks” Topic

### “Too Broad”

If you choose a topic that is too big and broad, it will likely be hard to make a strong argument. You find too many information sources and, as a consequence, it may be difficult to decide what to include or exclude or what are the most relevant sources.

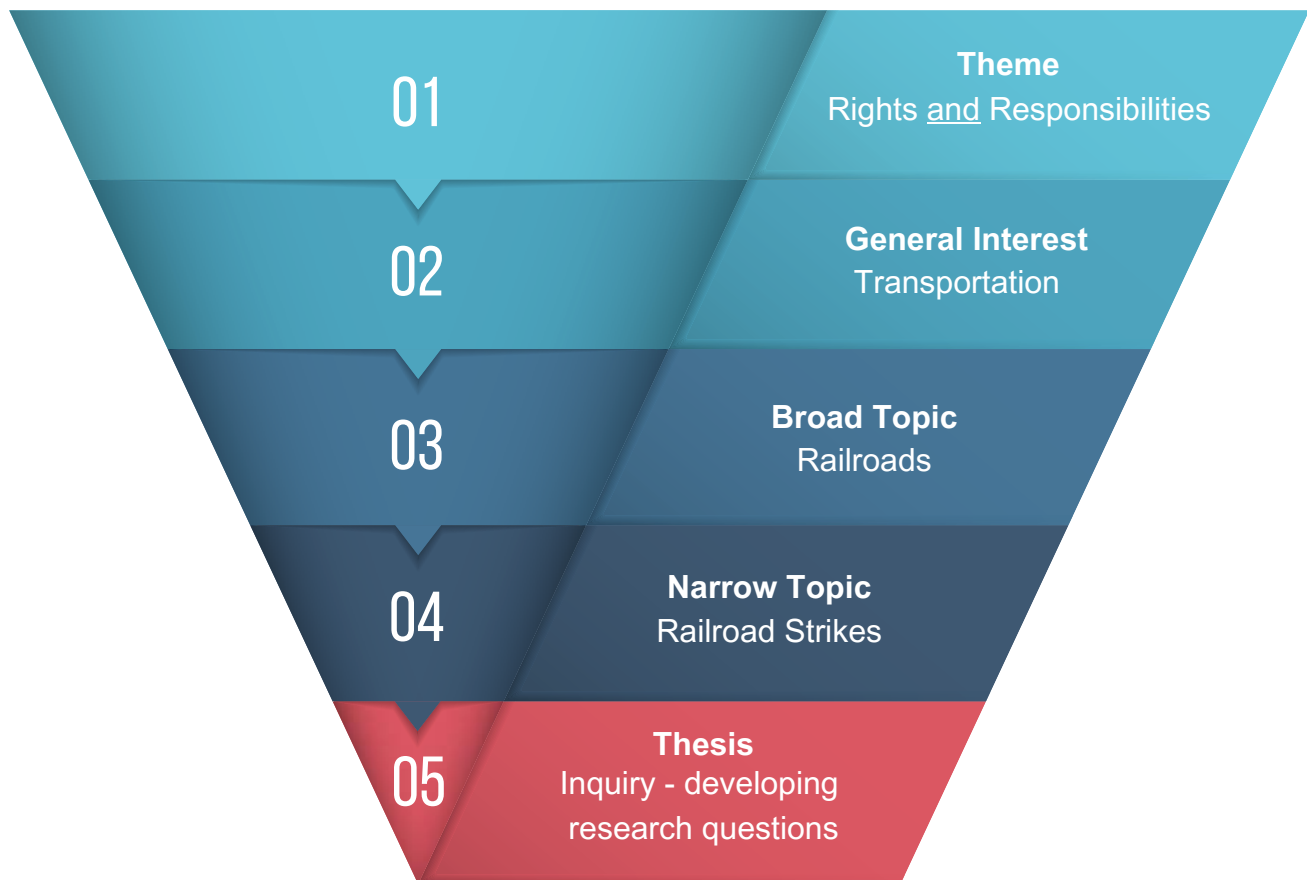
### “Too Narrow”

Choosing a topic that is too specific might make it difficult to find the necessary resources to fully flesh out your argument. If you feel that your topic is too specific, consider pulling back and looking at the bigger picture.

### “Just Right”

Selecting a “just right” topic means that you have narrowed down enough to have a focus that can be supported by a variety of primary and secondary sources to use as evidence to support your claims.

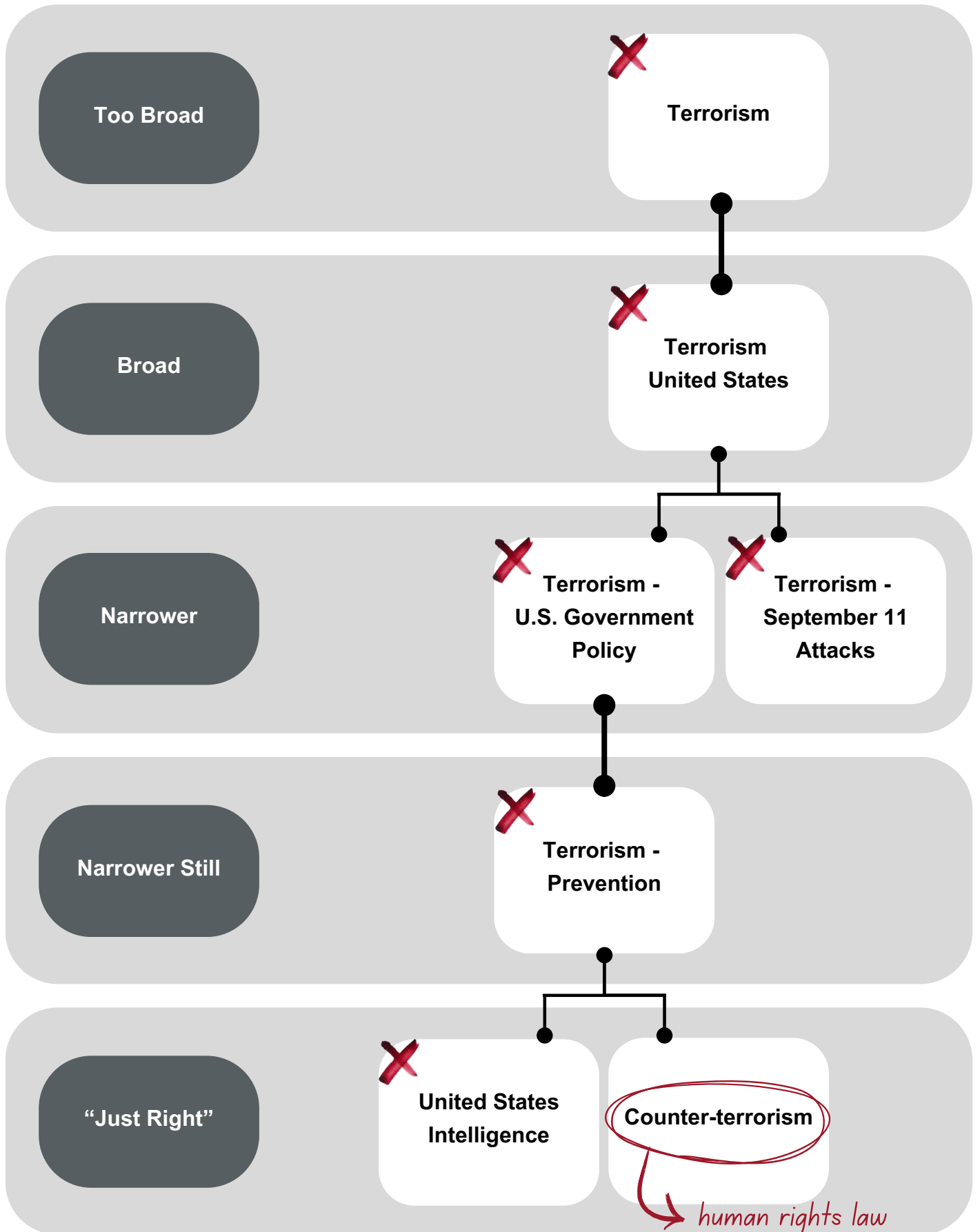
Think of the topic selection process as a funnel.



## Research Questions

As you dig deeper into a topic, you will likely come up with some great research questions. These questions will help to guide your research.

# Example



# Funnel Your Topic

Think of the topic selection process as a funnel.

Using the funnels below, try to narrow down **two** of your general interests into more focused topics. Record any initial research questions that come to mind.

Topic	Topic
General Interest	General Interest
Broad Topic	Broad Topic
Narrow Topic # 1	Narrow Topic #2

Create one or more research question(s) for each topic below.

Narrow Topic # 1

Narrow Topic # 2

# Topic Development

## Developing Your Research Topic

This exercise is designed to help you develop a thoughtful topic for your History Day research. Answer the following questions to help you better understand and refine your thinking about your research topic.

### 1 What general topic interests you?

Choose a topic that matters to you - something that has meaning in your life. Can't think of one? Browse the following online library resources for inspiration: CQ Researcher, Opposing Viewpoints, or TED talks. You can find links to these sites at [Need A Topic](#).

### 2 How did you become interested in this topic?

Why did you choose this topic? In 2 or 3 sentences, explain why you are interested this topic (Examples: This directly impacts me or someone I know by..., or Hearing about this topic stimulated me to learn more because...)

### 3 Think about the following elements of your topic.

Who	Who is involved? Whom does it affect? Is there a specific population you want to focus on? Identify specific people and their perspectives.
What	Consider the "so what" of your topic. Why does it matter to others?
Where	Where and when did the topic occur? Is there a geographic location you want to focus on?
How	How does one aspect of your topic affect another? How does it connect with the theme?

# Topic Development

4

Do some background reading.

**Did you identify any major ideas, concepts, or theories related to your topic?**

It's helpful to study the vocabulary used in reference to your topic.

**Define the basic terms used to describe your topic.**

Do different people define or "see" things differently?

**Could you identify any scholars or experts who do research on your topic?**

Experts/scholars may be identified or listed as Further Resources.

**Did you find any additional keywords to use when you search?**

Keywords change based on who is speaking. A scholar and a journalist may use different key words to describe the same thing. Why?

**Did the articles cite any useful sources that would be useful for your research?**



# Topic Selection



Review important topic considerations with this checklist.



**Does the topic fit the theme?**

☐

Your topic needs to have a connection to the History Day theme. Do some initial research to see if you can find a strong enough connection.

**Am I interested in this topic?**

☐

You will be spending a lot of time researching. The more interested you are in your topic, the easier it will be to stay motivated.

**Can I find enough research on my topic?**

☐

Are there enough primary and secondary sources available on your topic? Do a basic search to see what is available. If there isn't much, considering pivoting to a new topic. A successful History Project will have a variety of sources to support your ideas.

**Is my topic historically significant?**

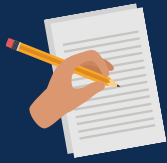
☐

You will need to make an argument about how your topic was important in history. It's okay to choose a lesser known topic, but you *will* need to show how the topic impacted history. Did you know that even local history topics have had big impacts?

**Is my topic historic?**

☐

History is being made all the time! If your topic is too recent, you will have a hard time figuring out the topic's long-term significance in history. It's best to select a topic that took place at least 25+ years in the past.



# Topic Proposal

**Student Name(s)**

**Who or what do you want to study this topic?**

**Why are you interested in studying this person, event, or idea?**

**How does your topic relate to the NHD theme for this year?**

**Describe why this person or event is historically significant.  
Give three clear reasons why this topic was important at a local, national, or world level.**

- —
- —
- —

# Public and Academic Libraries

Research is an essential part of the History Day process. Did you know that there is a natural progression of library use? During the research process you will move from a wide idea to a more specific focus. Think about where you are in your research, and find the library that will work best for your current research needs. Most libraries will be more than happy to help you along your research journey. Librarians are experts in navigating their own collections, so don't be afraid to ask for help.



## School Libraries

Libraries within schools are excellent for topic exploration and understanding a basic theme connection. Be sure to talk about database access with your digital media specialist.

## Public Libraries

Public libraries usually have more resources than school libraries. Look for secondary sources which are helpful when beginning to understand the general narrative of your topic. Public resources may have extensive interlibrary loan connections, through which you could get sources from another library (in or out of state) sent to you as a short-term loan.

Keep in mind that you may need to acquire a free library card.

## Academic Libraries

Academic libraries contain high-level research material and most are available for public use. Many academic institutions have collections with specialized focus, as well as primary source material. Some of these collections are digitized, although you may not view them without permission from the library itself. Often times, you can access college library catalogues online, but to actually see the material you usually will have to go to the library itself. Appointments are usually required. Call the school's librarian with inquiries about their policies and procedures or to schedule a visit.

## Plan Ahead and Prepare

Many libraries have online library catalogs. Searching for call numbers in advance before heading to the public library means that you could begin finding materials upon your arrival. During a scheduled academic library visit, some librarians can actually pull sources from their collections to have ready for when you arrive.

# Other Research Locations

## Museum Exhibitions and Collections

Museums have several functions in the areas of education, collections, exhibits, research, and preservation. Most of these functions have the potential to help strengthen a History Day research experience.

Museum educators are incredible resources as they can direct students to articles, exhibits, and other references that relate to a History Day topic. They may help students understand the significance of an artifact or source, so do not be afraid to ask to speak to a museum educator.

Museum exhibits may help you brainstorm ideas for topics, sharpen the focus of a topic, or even expand your understanding of historical context. You may be able to photograph an exhibit and use the images in one's History Day project. Before you take a photo, however, make sure to ask about the Museum's photography policy. Museum exhibits may also spawn ideas for performance sets and props.

Museum curators and archivists do tremendous amounts of research in preparation for museum exhibits. Students may consider interviewing them if there is a display that is pertinent to their topic. Setting up an interview may take persistence and time, so make sure to include that in your schedule.

### Local and State Historical Societies

If you are researching a topic that “hits close to home?” If so, consider contacting your local or state historical societies. Their staffing and hours will vary greatly, so keep that in mind. Researching a VT topic? Start here:

[Local Historical Societies](#)

### Student Research Days

Vermont History Day hosts cost free Student Research Days at the Leahy Library at the Vermont History Center in Barre, Vermont. Please visit the Vermont History Explorer webpage for exact dates.

## Historic Sites and Monuments

Is there a historic site or monument that ties to your History Day topic? The stewardship and interpretation of historic sites help to evoke an authentic sense of time and place. Many state-owned historic sites have permanent exhibitions that interpret their unique history, as well as regularly changing displays that focus on specialized subjects. Before you make a trip to a historic site or monument, try to do a little research about its relevancy to the topic so that it doesn't feel like a wasted trip.

# Starting the Research Process

## Where do I start?

Now that you have selected a topic, and you have an introduction as to where you can do research, the process begins. First, you need to locate sources of information. For historians, a source is any provider of information used to interpret a topic. It is your job as a researcher to seek, locate, and find information from a variety of sources.

Think of a detective who seeks accurate and credible information and clues in order to re-create events and solve a crime. A history researcher is like a detective because they seek out a wide variety of information to see the big picture. A researcher must locate, comprehend, and analyze sources to tell a historic story. Therefore, the main tools of a researcher are sources.

## Online Research

The internet is a vast receptacle of information. It is important to recognize that despite being a place that houses reputable sources, it is also full of misinformation. Many online sources do not contain information that is correct or has been fact checked. That's why it's of utmost importance to make sure that you're using the right types of websites for your research. Government and educational websites are generally the most reliable.

### Scholarly Databases

Scholarly databases are usually reliable when it comes to finding credible sources for research. Online scholarly databases that can be trusted and are known to provide useful information for students. Examples include:

- LexisNexis
- EBSCO

### Newspapers and Magazines

When it comes to news articles, more caution must be taken since it's hard to know which sources are truly reliable and unbiased. Although sometimes biased, newspapers and magazines can also be a great place to find information about current events.

## Wikipedia

Wikipedia is a massive pool of information. Since it allows the public to edit information, it should not be considered a strong source on its own. Sites such as these often run the risk of lacking accuracy, and is not one of the most credible sources for research. However, when writing a research paper, it may help to direct you to more credible sources or experts on your topic. Wikipedia may be helpful in the initial steps of research, but should never be depended upon exclusively.

## Journal Articles

When it comes to journal articles, determining how credible they are comes much easier than other sources. Many of these websites will include valuable information such as how many times the article has been cited, and if it has been peer reviewed. Examples of reliable websites for journal articles include:

- Google Scholar
- Microsoft Academic
- Cornell University Library
- SAGE Publishing
- Oxford Academic

# Evaluate Source Reliability

## The CRAAP Test

The CRAAP Test is a litmus test to determine whether a source is credible. The acronym stands for Currency, Relevancy, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. Learn how to evaluate a source by considering the questions associated with each word in the acronym below.

### Currency



- Is the information timely?
- Is it out-of-date?
  - Does it matter for what you're researching?
- Has the information been updated since it was published?

### Relevancy



- Is the source directly related to your topic?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Does it meet the needs of your work?

### Authority



- Is the author qualified to write on this topic?
- What are their credentials that make them an expert?

### Accuracy



- Is the information supported by evidence?
- Can you find the information from more than one source?
- Is the writing professional?

### Purpose

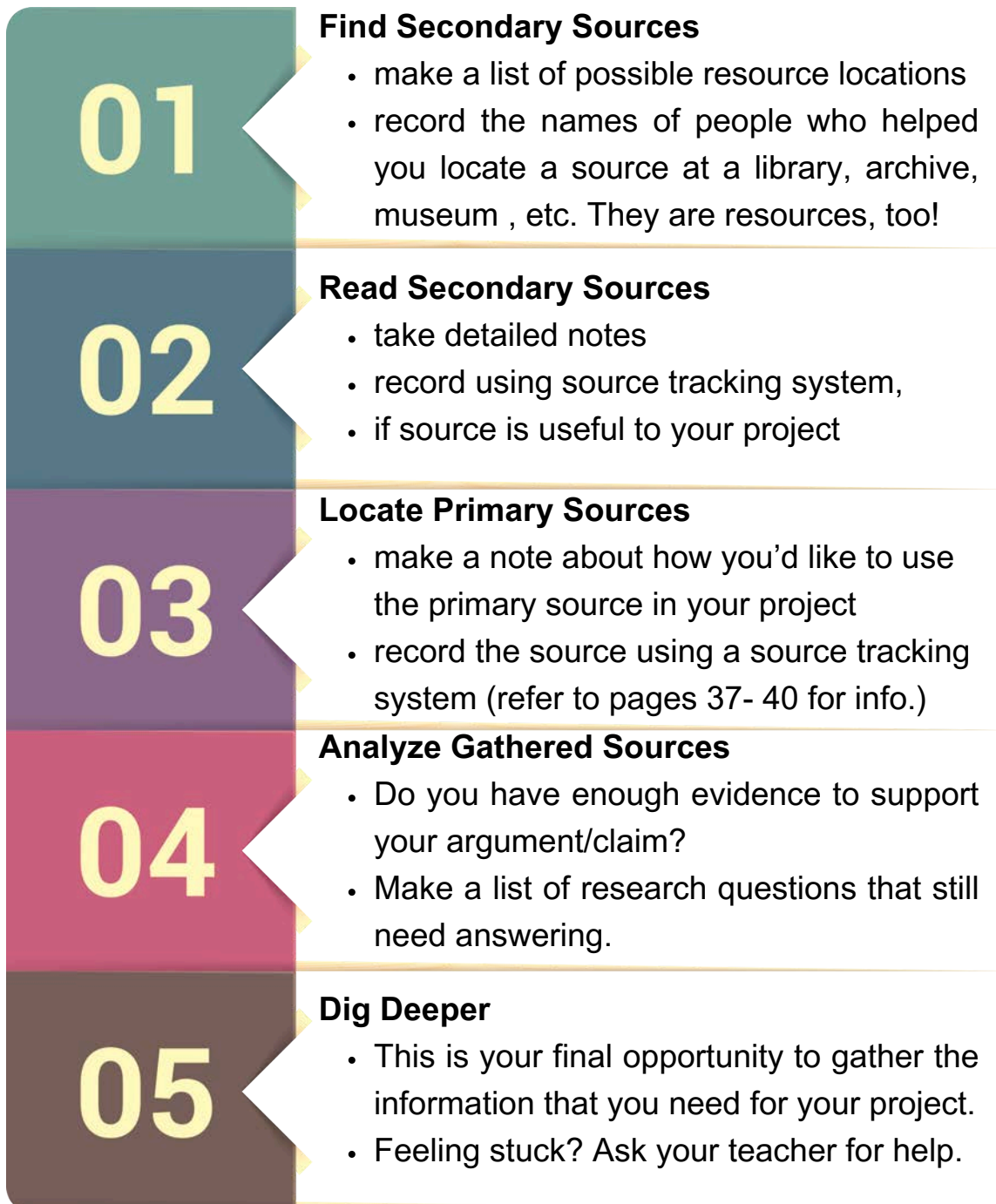


- What is the purpose of the information?
  - Is it to inform, teach, sell, entertain, or persuade?
- Is the information presented as fact or opinion?
- Is it balanced?

# Five Steps of Historical Research

## A Tried and True Approach

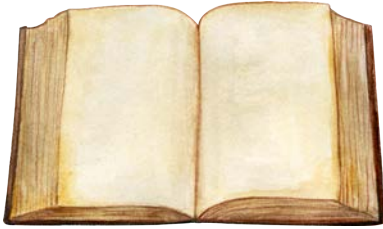
After you have selected your topic, experience has shown that following these steps in order are helpful. In the past, students have found that choosing a source tracking system and then beginning their research with secondary sources helped them access whether they will have enough research available for the project. If they found there weren't enough sources, they could pivot to a new topic before losing any more precious time. We suggest that you do the same. Only after you have a solid grounding in secondary source research do we suggest looking for primary sources.



# Secondary Source Research

Research begins after you select a topic.

**The goal is to learn as much as you can about your topic.**



Researchers and historians use two key types of resources to research - primary and secondary. Using both types of sources strengthens an argument. Do you know the key differences between the two types?

## Secondary Sources

Secondary sources retell, analyze, or interpret events. They are written after an event is over by someone who did not experience the historical era first-hand. They are usually written decades, if not centuries, after the time period by historians. Secondary sources are drawn from many primary sources. Secondary sources have the advantage of hindsight. They can help you grasp:

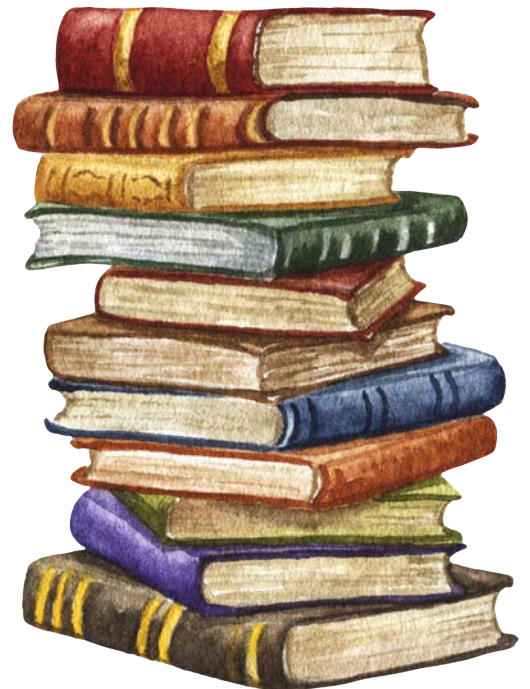
- what was known about the event from the primary source's creator
- other related events from the same time period
- why the event is considered historically significant

## Historic Context

It's a great idea to begin your research examining secondary sources because it can help provide important historical context related to your topic. They can help put a historical figure or event into a "big picture" context. Reading secondary sources helps a researcher make connections between a topic and other important ideas, people, places, and events.

## Topic Refinement

Primary sources are generally from only one perspective. Therefore, they can be conflicting and contradictory. Secondary sources can be helpful in clarifying the discrepancies because it has the benefit of distance, and therefore may be more objective.



# Research Process

Research is the foundation of any History Day project. Read sources like books, articles, websites, and more to learn why your topic is important in history. Learning about the main events of your topic is a great start. Learn about what happened before, during, and after your topic to ensure that you are demonstrating a fuller understanding of your topic's significance. The information that you find in each of these areas will be part of your final project and you will use it to write the thesis and text for each section of your project.

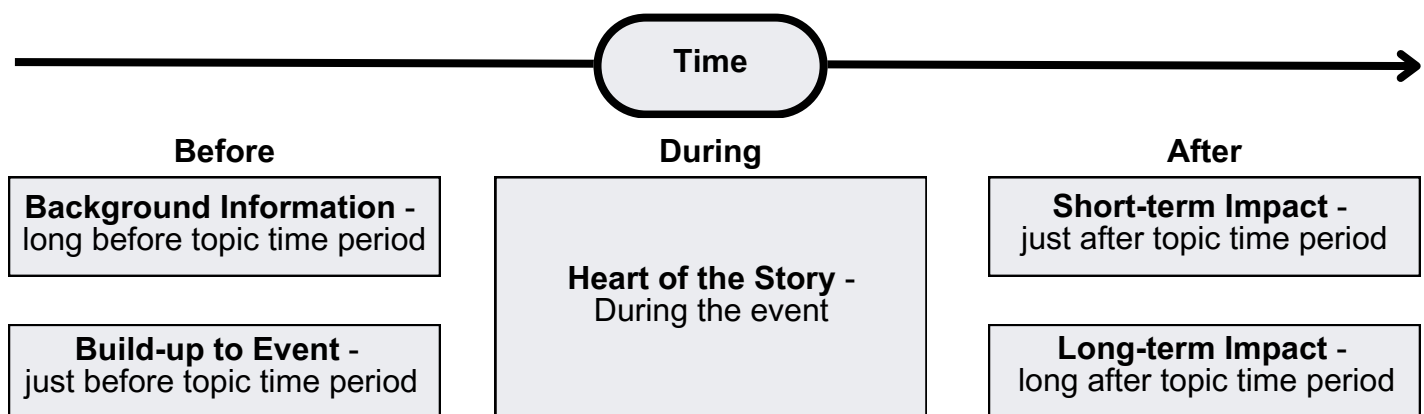
Each History Day project category is strongest when it includes separate sections to discuss what happened before, during, and after the main events of your topic. Sections within specific categories may look like:

- Panel sections on an exhibit
- Pages on a website
- Segments of a documentary
- Scenes in a performance
- Paragraphs in a paper

## Section Your Project






What goes in each section of your project?

1. Begin with the **Heart of the Story**. This should include the main events of your topic you plan to focus on. The thesis should tie to the Heart of the Story.
2. Next, go to the **Build-Up**. What happened right before the main event? Think of it as the “spark” that got your main event going.
3. Now, go to the **Background Information**. What bigger ideas and issues does your viewer need to understand before the Build-Up and Heart? Describe the related issues or problems that were going on before the main events.
4. Now, you can outline the **Short-Term Impact**. What were the immediate results of your main event?
5. Last, think about the **Long-Term Impact**. Explain major changes and how your topic connects to larger trends in history.








# Research Process

## Dive Deeper into Project Sections

<p><b>Heart of the Story</b></p> 	<p>What is the main event that you're focusing on in your project?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>What</b> happened? Include important details.</li> <li>• <b>How</b> did it happen?</li> <li>• <b>When</b> did it happen?</li> <li>• <b>Why</b> did it happen?</li> <li>• <b>Who</b> was involved or affected?</li> <li>• <b>Where</b> did it happen?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Build-up</b></p> 	<p>Think about it as “the spark” for the main event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What events or ideas led up to the Heart of the Story?</li> <li>• What inspired people to get involved? Be more specific than the background section.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Background Information</b></p> 	<p>The events that occurred long before the Heart of the Story provide historical context.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What background information does your reader need to know about topic?</li> <li>• What events, ideas, or people influenced it?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Short-term Impact</b></p> 	<p>These are the events that happened right after the main event.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What changed right away? Think about positive <i>and</i> negative changes.</li> <li>• How did your topic impact different groups of people?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Long-term Impact</b></p> 	<p>These are the events that happened long after the Heart of the Story. Take a step back and take a wider view.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are things different because of your topic?</li> <li>• How has your topic changed history?</li> </ul>

# Research Planning

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Topic:</b>	<b>Date:</b>
<b>Heart of the Story</b> 		
<b>Build-up</b> 		
<b>Background Information</b> 		
<b>Short-term Impact</b> 		
<b>Long-term Impact</b> 		

# Notetaking Basics

When researching, gathering and recording information are two sides of the same coin. They go hand-in-hand. During the research process, you will interact with many sources. Recording vital information about each source, as you are interacting with it, is helpful for two reasons. First, it helps you remember what you learned from each source. Second, it ensures that you are crediting the source correctly when you refer to it in your project. Notetaking and tracking the sources you use are two separate tasks. In this section, we'll focus on notetaking skills.

## Types of Notetaking

The three most common types of notetaking include: paraphrasing, summarizing, and quoting. When you find an important piece of information in one of your sources, you must assess what type of notetaking will work best for your situation.

### Paraphrasing

- Put the information into your own words
- Don't change the meaning
- Try to make it about the same length as the original

### Summarizing

- Put the information into our own words
- Don't change the meaning
- Write a synopsis or make it significantly shorter in length as the original

### Quoting

- Use a quote when there is inspiring and meaningful wording
- Use a quote when something is said by an expert that you want to recognize to strengthen your arguments
- Use it with statistics or information that would not be considered common knowledge
- Put the exact wording from the source inside quotation marks
- If you choose to eliminate words, show your audience by using an ellipsis (...)

### What if the sources are difficult to understand?

When researching for History Day, you may feel overwhelmed by dense articles or primary documents written in old script or complicated language. It's okay! Skim texts, look-up unfamiliar words, use indexes, or ask an adult to help you with sources that feel confusing.

# Notetaking Option 1: Note Cards

One way you can take notes and organize your research is to use index cards. As you read through a source, you can use two types of note cards: source cards and note/quote cards. Consider organizing Source Cards and Note and Quote Cards by color.

## The Three Steps of Notetaking Option 1

01

### Source Cards

Write down bibliographic information on an index card for **each** source. Include the type of source, title, author, and year the source was published. You will use this information to create your bibliography.

02

### Note and Quote Cards

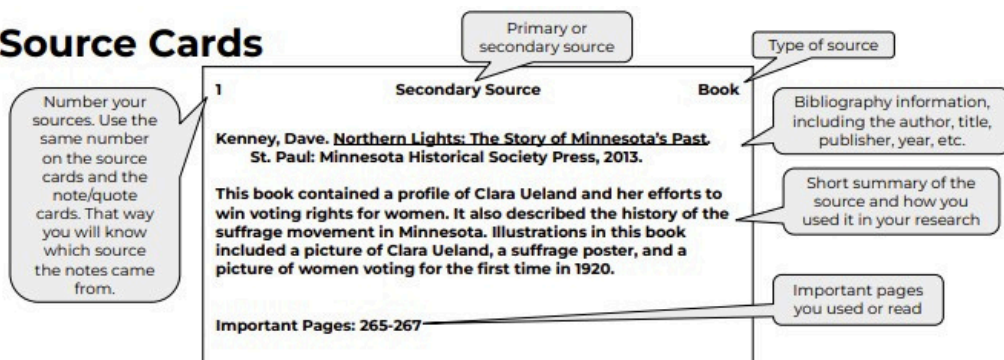
Use a different set of index cards to record the notes and quotes that you find in your source. Record each big idea or quote on its own card which means you will probably use many index cards for each source.

03

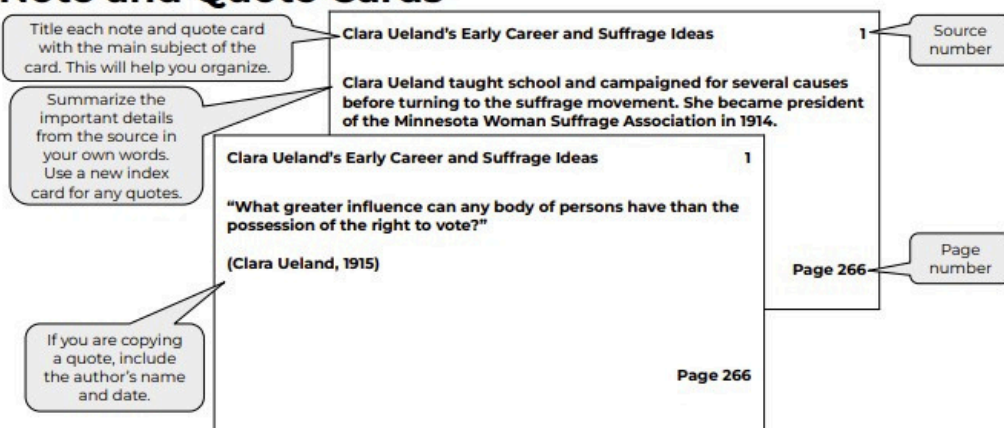
### Organize Your Information

Sort your cards into different stacks after you think you are done researching. Make one stack for each section of your project (background, main event, heart, short-term impact, and long-term impact). Each section should have cards.

### Source Cards



### Note and Quote Cards



# Notetaking Option 2: Charting Method

Another way you can take notes and organize your research is to use the Charting Method. The Charting Method is a notetaking approach that uses charts to condense and organize notes. It involves splitting a document into several columns and rows which are then filled with summaries of information.

It's easier to think of your notes as an Excel or Google spreadsheet where each column has its own category of information and each row has its own topic.

## How to Take Notes Using the Charting Method

### 1. Read your sources first

- a. As you review those materials, ask yourself:
  - i. What is the main topic of the material?
  - ii. What are the subtopics?
  - iii. What categories of information can be noted about or compared between these subtopics?

### 2. Identify categories and topics

### 3. Set up your paper or spreadsheet

- a. Create columns that represent all of your information categories and create rows that represent each of your subtopics.
- b. Add an extra column on the far right side of your chart where you write extra notes that might not fit with the categories you identified before class.

### 4. Record information in the appropriate column

- a. Add words, phrases, main ideas, descriptions, and more about each subtopic in the appropriate category column.
- b. As you continue to read sources, continue to add information to the columns and observe:
  - i. Are there subtopics that are heavy with evidence?
  - ii. Are there arguments that you'd like to make that need more support?

## Charting Method

Main Topic	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3
Subtopic 1			
Subtopic 2			
Subtopic 3			

# Notetaking Option 3: Doodle Notes

The effectiveness of visual notetaking is supported by scientific research. The Picture Superiority Effect explains that we tend to remember images more clearly and for longer periods than words or text. For example, if students read text alone, they typically recall only 10 percent of the information after three days. However, adding a picture boosts recall to 65 percent. Additionally, dual-coding theory suggests that our brains process and store visual information differently from verbal or text-based information. By combining images and text in notetaking, students create two distinct ways to access the information, significantly improving their chances of remembering it.

When used properly, visual notetaking can help you stay engaged in studying, remember more information, improve their ability to organize thoughts and connect details. Try it. If it's not for you, find another notetaking strategy that works better.



# Primary Source Research

## Primary Sources

Primary sources are sources created during the time that the event took place. The creator of the source lived in the historical period in which the source was created. They may feel personal. Primary sources are fragments of information told from one perspective. It is the job of a you - the researcher - to ask questions, seek additional evidence, and make connections.



## “Frozen in Time”

Primary sources are invaluable to a researcher because they are unaltered by time. Primary sources allow a researcher to discover history first hand, through the words, artifacts, and images of the people who lived it. They can provide facts and details about a particular topic, and some may even offer a “flavor” or a particular person or event through anecdotal story.

## Bias

These sources may be surprising and even exciting, but not all primary sources are unbiased. The job of a researcher is to understand how and why people behaved the way that they did in the past. One single viewpoint or perspective is not the only opinion expressed during a particular historic era. Finding a variety of perspectives can help a researcher understand the complexity of the past.

## Primary Source Examples

- Artifacts
- Autobiographies
- Government records
- Interviews with participants
- Letters
- Manuscript collections
- Music from the period
- Newspapers from the era
- Original film footage
- Photographs

## Secondary Source Examples

- Biographies
- Books about the topic
- Encyclopedias
- History textbooks
- Interviews with scholars or experts
- Media documentaries
- Websites



# Visual and Media Sources



Visuals or other media are essential to strengthen your argument and make your project stand out. Get creative and think beyond just photographs. Consider various types of media that could support your research. Jot down notes about the sources you discover.

<b>Artifacts</b> Artifacts are the things that past peoples made, changed, and left behind where they lived and worked. Museums collections may include artifacts. Examples include: clothing, buildings, and tools.	
<b>Artwork</b> Has your topic been represented through painting, drawing, or sculpture? Who was the artist? What may have influenced their representation of the topic?	
<b>Charts and Graphs</b> Charts and graphs help to express complex data in a simple format. Adding them may help your audience access your research.	
<b>Documents</b> Documents can be interesting visuals in a project. They can also help to stoke a human connection. Examples include: letters, government records, ledgers.	
<b>Ephemera</b> Ephemera are items that were expected to be used for a short time or were thought to be popular for a short time. They are often considered collectible. Examples include: stamps, posters, postcards, movie tickets.	
<b>Film Footage</b> Moving pictures weren't invented until the late 1890s which may limit their use depending on your topic. Primary source footage may be available.	



# Visual and Media Sources



<b>Interviews</b> Use an interview that has already been recorded. Even better, conduct your own interview with a participant or expert on your topic. NHD video: <u><a href="#">What's the difference between oral histories and interviews with experts</a></u>	
<b>Maps</b> Maps can help your audience understand where your topic occurred. Compare a historic map with a modern map. Maps can contain so much more than location. Practice close looking to discover more information.	
<b>Music or Sound Recording</b> If you plan on using a recording, remember that sound wasn't recorded until the 1860s. Sheet music and compositions may make an interesting addition to your project, as well.	
<b>Newspapers</b> Headline and article clippings from newspapers can be eye-catching to your audience.	
<b>Political Cartoons</b> Most political cartoons are printed in newspapers or magazines at the time of the event. They can help to reflect public sentiment, offer context, and perspective.	
<b>Propoganda or Ads</b> These illustrations were designed to persuade people. Examples include: posters, advertisement, pamphlets, postcards.	

# Common Misconceptions

## Common Research Misconceptions

**The sources I used  
*most* are my  
primary sources.**

Please don't make that same mistake. If you need clarification about what a primary source is, please refer to page 28 in this guide.

**Primary sources are “better” than  
secondary sources.**

Quality research relies on both types of sources.

**A single source - either  
primary or secondary - is a  
complete historic record.**

It's simply not true. Completing thorough research, considering multiple perspectives through varied sources, aids a researcher in coming closer to a more complete picture.

**My friends are in my group.  
We can rely on each other  
without having to check-in  
with each other.**

It's best practice to communicate with your group members often. History Day projects are comprised of several components. Checking-in often ensures that no crucial aspect of the project is going undone. It's a great time to recalibrate if an approach needs adjusting, or a task needs to be reassigned.

# What is a Thesis?

With a History Day project your ultimate goal is to make an argument, related to the annual theme, and clearly making a case about the significance of your topic to history. This argument is known as your thesis statement, it is the central focus of your entire History Day project. A good thesis statement is clear, specific, and focused. Not only does it draw the reader's attention to your topic, but it also announces your perspective on the topic.

## Laying the Foundation

Regardless of the category you eventually decide upon, your thesis statement or argument, must be the centerpiece of your work. The thesis statement should be a part of the introduction and conclusion of a paper, website, performance or documentary. If you are creating an exhibit, it should be centrally located, and easy to read.

Every component of your project **MUST** support your thesis, so use it to guide and organize your project.

## Revision and Edits

Writing a thesis statement can be challenging, hard work. Did you know that effective scholars and writers revise their work throughout the research process? No one nails their thesis on the first attempt. So, edit and revise; revise and edit. Keep rewriting your thesis statement throughout your own research process until you have effectively stated your argument or claim.



## Thesis Approaches

Would you like some more guidance? First, watch the video on the right to see the differences between different theses and hone in on one why one stood out above the rest.

The next few pages are designed to help you write a strong thesis. Use either approach, if its useful. Remember to edit and sharpen your thesis through the research process.



[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6\\_LFIHp-61I&t=170s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_LFIHp-61I&t=170s)

# Thesis Development Approach: 5 Ws

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

After you've taken notes on several sources, use what you've learned to answer the questions below. Summarize your information into a two sentence thesis, or historical argument. The first sentence should be a summary of the 5W's of your topic. The second sentence should explain the impact your topic had in history.

Question	Answer
Who was involved Who was affected?	
What happened?	
Where did it take place?	
When did it happen?	
Why did it happen and what caused it?	
Why is it important? How did it change history? Think about your theme connection!	
Thesis Statement	First Sentence: Summarize the 5 W questions
Second Sentence: How did your topic change history? Relate it to theme.	

# Thesis Development Approach:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Steps 1 and 2 are designed to be completed after brief preliminary research. Steps 3 and 4 should be completed after you have done some additional secondary source research. Step 5 focuses on revision. You should wait until you feel you are “done” with your research to complete Step 5.

## STEP 1: DRAFT

- Create a first draft of your History Day thesis in three sentences.
- Replace the underlines with your own words answering the questions in parentheses.

### First Sentence: Before Your Main Event

Before \_\_\_\_\_ (your main event) in \_\_\_\_\_ (general time period), the problem/situation in \_\_\_\_\_ (location) was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (describe specific problem or situation).

### Second Sentence: The 5 Ws

In/On \_\_\_\_\_ (specific year/date) \_\_\_\_\_ (who: person/group)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (action describing main event including specific location) because/in order to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (why/motivation).

### Third Sentence: Impact on History

Shortly after, \_\_\_\_\_ (describe short term impact/s). This changed history because/by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ (describe long term impact/s).

## STEP 2: Combine

- Combine your sentences into one thesis. Copy your finished sentences from above without the describing words in parentheses.
- Keep your sentences in the same order.

## STEP 3: Brainstorm Theme

- Brainstorm your theme connection.
- Fill in the blanks below with your own words.

What is the annual theme?

How does your main event relate to the theme?

Have you considered multiple perspectives? How are they differ?

## STEP 4: Add Theme

- Copy your thesis from the box in Step 2.
- Think about how the theme fits in your thesis.
- Revise your thesis to include the theme connection from Step 3.

## STEP 5: Revise

- Your thesis statement is a work in progress. Copy your thesis statement from Step 4.
- Edit your thesis to make changes.
  - Are there ways to make it sound better?
  - Can you incorporating any new ideas you have come across in your research?

# Project Category Breakdown



## Project Category

- Do you want to work independently or in a group?
- How would you prefer to share your research?
  - Do you want to continue developing skills that you already have or would you rather develop a new set of skills?

## There are two age categories at Vermont History Day

Age Division	Grades	Advances To
Junior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5</li> <li>• 6-8</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does not advance to NHD</li> <li>• may advance to NHD</li> </ul>
Senior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 9-12</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may advance to NHD</li> </ul>

## There are two age categories at Vermont History Day

Age Division	Individual	Group (2-5 students)
Junior Senior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paper</li> <li>• Individual Performance</li> <li>• Individual Documentary</li> <li>• Individual Website</li> <li>• Individual Exhibit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group Performance</li> <li>• Group Documentary</li> <li>• Group Website</li> <li>• Group Exhibit</li> </ul>



Circle one or more categories that you would like to explore.

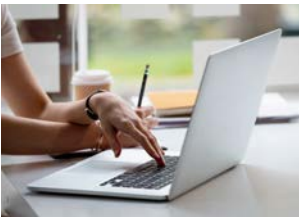
Paper	Website	Performance	Documentary	Exhibit
-------	---------	-------------	-------------	---------

## Paper

- individual
- 1500-2500 words (about 6-10 pages, double spaced)
- grammatically correct
- ideas are based on your own research
- includes citations that support your claim
- process paper and bibliography are required

## Website

- individual or group
- website created on NHDWebCentral only
- website is an original creation
- 100MB maximum
- no more than 1200 student composed words
- information from others must be cited
- quotes and visuals must be credited
- no links to external websites
- process paper and bibliography are required



## Exhibit

- individual or group
- exhibit is an original creation
- maximum size: 6 ft. tall, 3ft. 4in. wide, 2 ft. 6 in. deep (72" x 40" x 30")
- no more than 500 student composed words
- ideas are based on your own research
- information from others must be cited
- process paper and bibliography are required



## Documentary

- individual or group
- documentary is an original creation
- maximum length: 10 minutes
- ideas are based on your own research
- write your own script and record your own narration
- must cite sources in end credits
- process paper and bibliography are required

## Performance

- individual or group
- performance is an original creation
- maximum length: 10 minutes
- suggested length: 8-10 minutes
- write your script from your own research
- must set up and break down your set/props
- judges and audience cannot participate
- process paper and bibliography are required

# Group Commitment Contract

Students who wish to work in groups **must have the contract signed by all students and parents/guardians** involved. You may work with up to five people in all categories except for paper. Once formed, the group will receive a blanket grade for the project. No allowances will be made if one member does not participate fully. **Choose your groups carefully.**

Names of individuals involved in the project:	
Annual theme:	
Area of interest or topic:	
Proposed project category:	
Date that project is due:	

## Group Agreements

- The group agrees to share equally in all work and in all expenses.
- Money may not be spent unless all members are consulted.
- All prize monies will be split evenly among the students.

We agree to work together to complete our History Day entry. We have reviewed the History Day rules and regulations with our parents/guardians and understand all the requirements of the event.

### Student Signatures

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

### Parent/Guardian Signatures

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

# Annotated Bibliography

## What is it?

A bibliography is an alphabetized list of sources you used. An annotated bibliography not only lists the sources, but also gives a short description of the the sources and how you used each of them in your entry.

A History Day annotated bibliography should be separated and organized in two sections - primary and secondary sources. Find out more here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmPYQ3fCKMA>

## Build the Annotated Bibliography as You Research

You should build your bibliography as you conduct your research. Waiting until the end of your project to complete this task could result in a messy, confusing, and complicated process. It's easy to forget sources, confuse one with another, and make errors.

When it comes to citing, you have two options: you can create the bibliography manually, or you can use tools like NoodleTools or other online bibliography generators.

How we cite sources varies based on the type of source (book, newspaper article, photograph, website, etc.). To make it easier, we have included some Source Card Templates for you to capture all of the important information from each source type to make creating your annotated bibliography easier.

## Citing Sources in a Historical Paper

There are two ways to cite your sources in a History Day paper: footnotes and parenthetical references. Both methods are appropriate, but it's important to choose one and remain consistent.

That said, most historians prefer footnotes in their papers, articles, or books because they allow readers to follow sources without disrupting the flow of the text.

Did you know that Microsoft Word or Google Docs can insert the footnote for you. You can find the "insert footnote" button in the reference section of the menu. Go to the help menu and type in "insert footnotes" for more help. If you enter a new footnote in the middle of your paper, the footnote numbers will adjust automatically.



# Source Card Templates

**Task:** Take notes on each source you use. When you are done, talk to your teacher about how to transfer to your annotated bibliography. You can write the citations on your own or use a website like EasyBib or NoodleTools. **You will need several copies of this page to take notes on all of your sources.**

Title of Illustration				
Creator		Date Created		
Publisher/Sponsor				
I found this image...	In a Book	OR	On the Web	
Illustration	Book Title		Website Title	
	Publisher		Sponsor of Site	
	City		Date Created	
	Year		Date You Used It	
How did you use this source?				

Author's Last Name			
Author's First Name			
Title of Book			
Publisher			
City of Publisher		Year	
I read this book...	Online	In Print	
How did you use this source?			

Author's Last Name			
Author's First Name			
Title of Book			
Publisher			
City of Publisher		Year	
I read this book...	Online	In Print	
How did you use this source?			

Author's Last Name			
Website Title			
Publisher/Sponsor			
URL			
Date Published		Date You Used It	
How did you use this source?			

Author's Last Name			
Website Title			
Publisher/Sponsor			
URL			
Date Published		Date You Used It	
How did you use this source?			

Author's Last Name			
Author's First Name			
Article Title			
Database Name			
Publisher/ Service Provider of Database			
Date Published		Date You Used It	
How did you use this source?			

Author's Last Name			
Author's First Name			
Article Title			
Database Name			
Publisher/ Service Provider of Database			
Date Published		Date You Used It	
How did you use this source?			

Article Title			
Encyclopedia Title			
Volume		Edition	
Publisher			
City of Publisher		Date	
I read this article	In Print	On the Web	In a Database
How did you use this source?			

Article Title			
Encyclopedia Title			
Volume		Edition	
Publisher			
City of Publisher		Date	
I read this article	In Print	On the Web	In a Database
How did you use this source?			

Author's First Name			
Author's Last Name			
Newspaper Title			
City of Publisher		Date	
Pages			
I read this article	In Print	On the Web	In a Database
How did you use this source?			

Author's First Name			
Author's Last Name			
Newspaper Title			
City of Publisher		Date	
Pages			
I read this article	In Print	On the Web	In a Database
How did you use this source?			

# Process Paper

A process paper is a description of no more than 500 words explaining how you conducted your research and created your entry. Most students will choose to write the process paper towards the end of their History Day process, once they have completed their research and begun construction of their project. It is important to spend time on this part of your entry because it is the first thing that judges review when evaluating History Day entries.

## Who needs to write a process paper?

NHD requires that there is one process paper for each entry in the exhibit, documentary, performance, and website categories. Paper students do not have to write process papers. If you are working in a group, you only need one process paper per entry. Make sure that group process papers are written from the perspective of all group members and contain words like “we” and “our” since you all did the work for the project.

## The process paper contains three parts:



## What needs to be included?

Your process paper should consist of four sections, as described below. The process paper can be written in a narrative style, incorporating all of the following sections, or it can be in question and answer format, with a descriptive paragraph to answer each question.

- The first section should explain how you chose your topic.
- The second section should explain how you conducted your research.
- The third section should explain how you selected your presentation category and created your project.
- The fourth section should explain how your project relates to the NHD theme. This paragraph is **often the most important part** of your process paper. It gives you a chance to not only explain the relationship of your topic to the National History Day theme, but also reiterate your argument or thesis. Why is your topic significant in history? Make sure that your theme connection and thesis are clear in your project itself, as well as in your process paper.

## Any other tips?

- The process paper doesn't need to be as formal as your project itself. It's okay to write in first person and use words like “I” and “we” when talking about your project. Be careful not to be too informal. Using slang is never appropriate.
- Using proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling is also a must. Your process paper is one of the few things the judges get to take with them after they are done viewing your project. Leave the judges with a good impression.
- The process paper must be typed on plain white paper and stapled in the top left corner.
- It should be assembled in the following order: title page, research description, and annotated bibliography.
- Do not enclose the process paper in a cover or binder.

# Title Page

The title page includes the title of the entry, name(s) of the student(s) who developed the entry, and the age division and category of the entry and number of student composed words and number of words in the process paper. Do not include any additional information or illustrations on the title page.

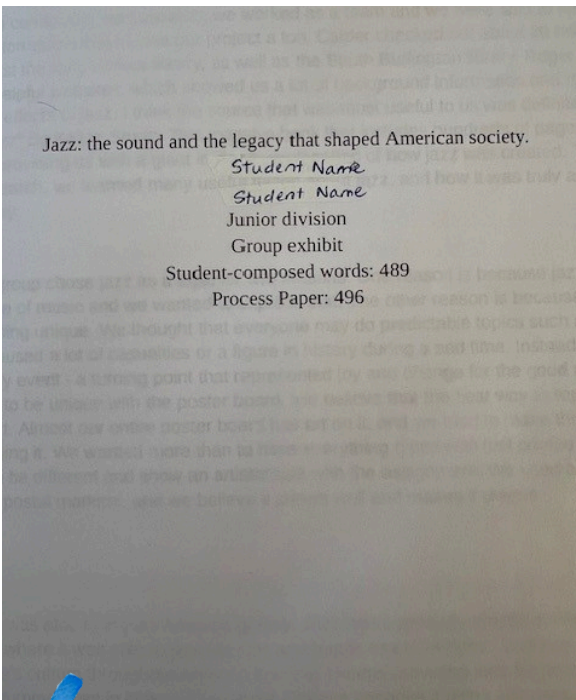
## Title

It is important to come up with a good title for your entry. A good title will quickly introduce your topic, and it will help the viewer understand your point of view. You should include ideas from the theme in your title.

For example, a title for an entry about Clara Ueland could be:

*The Legacy of Peaceful Protesting:  
Through the Leadership of Martin Luther King Jr.*

This title explains the topic and also gives a sense of the argument that Martin Luther King Jr. used his leadership to help encourage peaceful protesting.



**Does this meet the title page requirements?**

(Student names removed for privacy)

## Title Page Structure

- Title is 1/3 way down the paper and is centered
- All words are in Times New Roman, 12 point font
- Everything is single spaced
- Centered on the bottom of page:
  - Name: First and Last
    - All members, listed alphabetically
  - Junior Division or Senior Division
  - Individual or Group and Type
    - Exhibit, Performance, Documentary or Website
  - Student-composed Words: \_\_\_\_
    - Websites and Exhibits only
  - Process Paper: \_\_\_\_ words
    - All Projects

# Vermont History Day Preparations

## Three Ways to Prepare for History Day

### • **Double-check everything**

- Do you have all your materials in order?
- Have you spell, grammar, and fact-checked everything?
- Are all parts of your exhibit set up?
- Are your props and costumes in order?
- Are your website links working and your multimedia playing?
- Does your documentary run smoothly?
- Is your paper in good physical condition?
- If your project relies on technology, is it set up? Do you know how to use it?
- If a judge needs to download software to view multimedia, have you provided safe, legal, and accessible links so they can do so?
- **Do you have enough copies of your process paper and annotated bibliographies?**
  - All categories should bring 4 copies of each. Are they in presentation condition?
  - Documentaries are recommended to bring their projects online, on a thumb drive, and on a laptop (if you have one).

### • **Review your knowledge**

- Do you know the ins-and-outs of your topic? If asked, could you answer about any aspect of your project? Do you know enough so that you could answer a question about something not presented in your project but related to your topic? Don't worry too much about this step. After spending so much time working on your project, you'll have absorbed a lot of information.
- The purpose of this step isn't to learn or relearn, but to refresh your memory. Trust that you already know everything that you need. You have done your research.

### • **Familiarize yourself with the judging process**

- Judges look over all projects in the same category and number (individual or group project) in a period spanning multiple hours.
- A judging session is around 15 minutes long and comprises of reviewing your project with the judges and answering their questions. It's recommended that you arrive 10 minutes early to your destination so that you have time to adjust and prepare before being allowed in to your room.
- Although it's nerve-racking, try to stay as calm and confident as possible. You put so much work into your project, and your judges will see it. Trust yourself. You know what you need to know, you did the work, and you're adaptable enough that if you're asked a question you hadn't prepared for, you can give a satisfactory answer.

# History Day Judge Interviews

## The Purpose of Judge Interviews

The interview process is designed to give you - the students - a chance to demonstrate your knowledge. It's an opportunity to shine light on all that you have learned through research on your topic. Practicing answering these questions will help you build confidence on the day of the Vermont History Day contest. Practice answering some questions that you may encounter.

## General Questions

- How did you choose this topic?
- How is this topic related to this year's theme?
- In what ways, if any, did your thesis evolve?
- Why did you select the Exhibit/Documentary/Performance/Website/Paper category?
- How did you come up with the design for your project?
- What were some of the challenges you encountered drafting your project?

## Research Questions

- Which research sources did you find the most valuable? Why?
- Did using primary sources help you learn anything that you didn't know before? If so, give an example of something that you learned.
- What obstacles, if any, did you encounter while researching your topic?

## Topic Questions

- What is the most important point you are trying to convey about your topic?
- Why is this topic significant in history? Is the topic unique in history, or similar to other events/movements?
- What do you think were the most important factors that caused the event in question to occur? What context was necessary for the events to happen?
- Why did the people who are the subject of the entry get involved in whatever they were involved in?
- What were the most important consequences of this event or person's action?
- For Local History Topics - Do you think what was going on in \_\_\_\_\_  
(town/county/state) was unusual, or were the experiences of the people there typical of what was going on elsewhere? Why? How?

## Closing Questions

- What was your favorite part of participating in Vermont History Day?
- What is the most important skill you developed while completing this project?
- What changes would you make to improve your project if you had more time?
- Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we haven't asked you yet?