

Vermont History Day

Category Tips

Exhibits

Exhibits show information using pictures and text in a way that's easy to understand like many of the displays you might see at a museum.

When someone walks past your exhibit, it should grab their attention and make them want to learn more. A quality exhibit finds the right balance between sharing historical facts and looking interesting. You can also make your exhibit interactive by letting visitors play music, watch a video, or open a door or flap to reveal extra photos or documents.

Your exhibit should be easy to understand on its own. You'll get to answer judges questions about it in person, but your photos, text, and images should be clear enough that anyone could look at your exhibit and understand the main idea without your help.

Tips

- Refer to the NHD Rulebook for project dimensions (especially if you plan on exhibiting something other than a tri-fold), so that your project does not get disqualified based on size.
- A common layout for a tri-fold exhibit is:
 - Left panel - background and historical context
 - Center Panel - title, thesis, and main story
 - Right Panel - the effects or consequences of your topic.
 - Don't forget to include multiple perspectives!
- Your title should be the first thing people notice. Put it front and center on the board, if possible, and make it big enough to read across the room.
- Pick a font that is easy to read and make it large enough to see clearly. Dark, bold lettering in a sans-serif font is easiest to read.
- Use your title and section labels to guide the viewer's eye across your exhibit.
 - Make your labels "pop" by printing titles and subtitles on light-colored paper and placing them on a dark background. Construction paper, tagboard, or mat board all work well. You can also make photos and text stand out by putting a contrasting color behind them.
- Be picky about what you include on your exhibit. Only choose photos, text, and graphics on the board that support your thesis/claim or provide key historical context.
- If you have access, try to use a paper cutter to get clean, straight edges when trimming text and images.
- Placing physical objects or other materials on the table in front of the side panels is allowed. Only include items that purposely enhance your project.

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Documentaries

Documentaries work great for topics that have lots of visual primary sources like old photographs, paintings, drawings, or video footage. With just a smartphone, a school computer, and free editing apps, you can make a professional-looking documentary without and expensive equipment.

No matter how good your documentary looks, however, the history is what matters most. Don't get so focused on filming and editing that you forget about your research, evidence, and historical argument. Judges are looking for strong research, clear historical context, and a thorough analysis of your topic.

Tips

- Students must be the ones running all camera and editing equipment. There should be no outside help with these aspects of the project.
- Mapping out each scene in ahead of time helps, so its a good idea to plan your documentary by drawing a storyboard before you start filming.
- Keep notes on each scene on index cards or in a notebook. This will make the editing process a lot easier.
- Every image, sound clip, and video used in the documentary must be cited. Keep a running list and update it as you go.
- Use museuc to help set the mood for each scene.
 - Stick to rolyalty-free music. Using copyrighted music or video clips can prevent you from sharing your film publically, even on YouTube.
- Did you discover a historian's research and think it may be a good idea to interview them for your documentary? We advise against this idea. Your job is to research and analyze their work, not interview them. Instead, consider finding an oral hsitory recording that fits your topic.

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Websites

Websites are a great choice for topics that have many different types of primary sources (newspaper articles, political cartoons, maps, government documents, paintings, drawings, and photographs). You can also include up to three minutes of multimedia like songs, video clips, sounds, or oral history recordings.

Yes - building a website should showcase your website design ability and your comfort with computer technology. Most importantly, it should explain your topic's significance in history. To enter a History Day contest, your website must be built using [NHDWebCentral](#). Complete instructions on how to create an account, getting started, and building a website are available in the new [NHDWebCentral Instruction Guide](#).

All websites should reference primary and secondary sources related to your chosen topic. Historical analysis must be evident. Interactive multimedia, text, photographs, maps, and/or music can be used to help support your thesis/claim. Web pages will be interconnected by hyperlinks.

Before you start building, look at other historical websites for inspiration. Sites made by museums, universities, and historians are great to reference, too!

Tips

- Be prepared - the first few days using NHDWebCentral can be frustrating. Students who have done this before strongly recommend watching NHDWebCentral Instructional Videos. They also suggest drafting each page in Google Docs/Word before building it in NHDWebCentral. Editing during the planning process is always easier than editing while building the website.
- **Save your work constantly** while building your website. Saving frequently helps prevent glitches and keeps NHDWebCentral running more smoothly.
- Be selective about what you include. Only your most important images, media, and text should make it onto your site.
- Whenever you use an image, video clip, or other media, **make sure to credit the source on your website** and cite it in your annotated bibliography.
- Always use the highest-quality version of any photo or image you can find. Once you have an image you want to use, upload it to <https://images.google.com> and click the small camera icon. This will often help you find a sharper, higher-resolution version of the same image!
- Be very careful when deleting images from your image library. If you delete an image, you might not notice right away because your browser might still show it from its cache. Anyone visiting your site on a different browser will see broken links instead of images.

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Performances

Performances are a great choice for students who enjoy being creative and bringing history to life through acting, storytelling, and music. It's your chance to step into the past and transport an audience to another time period. While your performance should be dramatic and engaging, the history always comes first in importance. Your content is what matters most.

Planning costuming and props can be part of the fun. Keep in mind that you only have five minutes to set up and five minutes to break down your staging/props.

Tips

- Pick a topic that you are genuinely interested in and that you think would translate well into a live performance. Are you unsure if it will? Ask a student who has previously competed in the category for advice.
- Think about whether the topic works better as a solo or group performance.
- As you research, write down important facts, quotes, or moments that could support your thesis/claim.
- Write a thesis statement, supporting points, and a conclusion to begin. Then, try to figure out how to weave them into your performance. If possible, try to state your thesis/claim more than once during the performance.
- Write a script. Start by brainstorming your big ideas and how they could be performed. If you are working in a group, talk through how your characters might interact. Make sure that your script is grounded in historical evidence from your research.
- Don't just narrate a historical figure's life from birth to death. Instead, become that person! Try writing a script around a critical moment that helps your audience understand your main ideas.
- Include real dialogue, quotes, and excerpts from speeches to make your performance feel historically authentic. Always keep your script focused on your thesis and main arguments.
- **Make good use of your full 10 minutes.** Try not to rush, but don't waste time either.
- Think carefully about the set. Are there props that are central to your story and help to tell it visually?
- A good costume makes your performance more believable, but make sure it's as accurate to the time period as possible. Reference period photos for guidance.
- Plan your blocking (where each performer will stand, move, and interact with the set) so that everything works together smoothly.
- Practice, practice, practice! Speak clearly and project your voice so judges and the audience can hear you. Rehearse in full costume with your set as often as you can.

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Historic Papers

Writing a strong research paper boils down to three basic steps:

- Gather information through targeted research (Try to find both primary and secondary sources)
- Organize what you've found around a clearly stated thesis/claim
- Present it to your reader in a way that's clear and interesting

Your paper should have three main parts: an introduction that states your thesis/claim, a body section that develops your argument and connects to the annual theme, and a conclusion that flows naturally from your thesis/claim and the evidence you presented.

Ray Karras's article "Writing Essays That Make Historical Arguments" breaks down the difference between simply describing what happened and actually interpreting why it matters. A strong paper tells a clear story, but you also need to offer your own analysis to help guide your reader through the evidence.

Papers should include footnotes. Footnotes explain where a writer got an idea or quotation, giving credit to the original author. Footnotes also serve as evidence in support of your ideas. Check out the video on [Citing Your Sources – Annotated Bibliography](#) ([YouTube](#) & [Vimeo](#)).

Papers must have an annotated bibliography divided into primary and secondary sources. Entries should be in alphabetical order and correct bibliographic form.

Tips

- Make sure that the paper is long enough, but not too long. The paper must be between 1500 and 2500 words, or approximately 6-10 pages.
- **A quality history paper does more than tell a story, it makes an argument.**
 - Questions to consider:
 - What does the evidence suggest?
 - Why does this story matter?
 - What change resulted from these events?
 - What is the significance of the topic?
- Microsoft Word, Pages, and Google Docs have footnote functions built into the programs so you can easily add footnotes as you are writing.
- Cite only sources actually used in researching the paper. If you read a source but do not use it in the paper, then the source should not be included in the bibliography.