



Contest FAQ's

Some common questions related to the contest. Don't see yours answered? Email us at info@nhd.org.

CAN I CHANGE THE TITLE OR TOPIC OF MY ENTRY?

Students *can* change the title of their entry from one level of the contest to the next level. However, the topic of a project *may not* change once the project enters a competition (local, regional, or affiliate).

IS THE 500 WORD LIMIT IN AN EXHIBIT CATEGORY SEPARATE FROM THE 500 WORD LIMIT FOR THE PROCESS PAPER?

Yes, the title page, process paper, and bibliography are considered as being separate from the exhibit and do not count towards the 500-word limit for the exhibit itself.

CAN YOU HAVE PICTURES IN A PAPER, LIKE ILLUSTRATIONS, GRAPHS, ETC.?

Illustrations are acceptable. Captions do not count in the word total. Make sure that illustrations are directly related to the text, and don't overdo them. The people who volunteer as paper judges tend to be quite text-based, and they're probably not going to be impressed by excessive illustrations.

CAN I USE A FICTIONAL 1ST PERSON IN A PAPER OR PERFORMANCE?

Yes. At the beginning of the Category Rules for papers in the National History Day Rule Book, there's a description of papers: "A paper is the traditional form of presenting historical research. Various types of creative writing (for example, fictional diaries, poems, etc.) are permitted, but must conform to all general and category rules. Your paper should be grammatically correct and well written." The rules state, "A performance is a dramatic portrayal of your topic's significance in history and must be original in production." A performance is not simply an oral report or a recitation of facts. You can make up characters to make a broader historical point, but don't make up history. While performances must have dramatic appeal, that appeal should not be at the expense of historical accuracy.

Therefore, it is possible to have fictional characters, for example, writing a fictional diary. However, you need to make sure that you cite sources just as you would for a traditional paper or in a performance. Most importantly, it still has to be historically accurate. You can make up the character, but the circumstances and events of the character's life and which that character witnesses or participates in should be based on historical facts.

WHAT IS A PRIMARY SOURCE?

Primary sources are materials directly related to a topic by time or participation. These materials include letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews, documents, photographs, artifacts, or anything else that provides contemporary accounts about a person or event.

Some materials might be considered primary sources for one topic but not for another. For example, a newspaper article about D-Day (which was June 6, 1944) written in June 1944 would be a primary source; an article about D-Day written in June 2001 probably was not written by

an eyewitness or participant and would not be a primary source. Similarly, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered soon after the 1863 battle, is a primary source for the Civil War, but a speech given on the 100th anniversary of the battle of Gettysburg in 1963 is not a primary source for the Civil War. If there's any doubt about whether a source should be listed as primary or secondary, you should explain in the annotation why you chose to categorize it as you did.

ARE INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS PRIMARY SOURCES?

No, an interview with an expert (a professor of Civil War history, for example) is not a primary source, UNLESS that expert actually lived through and has first-hand knowledge of the events being described.

IF I FIND A QUOTE FROM A HISTORICAL FIGURE IN MY TEXTBOOK OR ANOTHER SECONDARY SOURCE AND I USE THE QUOTE IN MY PROJECT, SHOULD I LIST IT AS A PRIMARY SOURCE?

No, quotes from historical figures which are found in secondary sources are not considered primary sources. The author of the book has processed the quotation, selecting it from the original source. Without seeing the original source for yourself, you don't know if the quotation is taken out of context, what else was in the source, what the context was, etc.

SHOULD I LIST EACH PHOTOGRAPH OR DOCUMENT INDIVIDUALLY?

You should handle this differently in notes than in the bibliography. When you are citing sources for specific pieces of information or interpretations, such as in footnotes or endnotes, you should cite the individual document or photograph. In the bibliography, however, you would cite only the collection as a whole, not all the individual items. You should include the full title of the collection (e.g., Digges-Sewall

Papers or the Hutzler Collection), the institution and city or city/state where the collection is located (e.g., Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore). You can use the annotation to explain that this collection provided 7 photographs which you used in your exhibit or that collection provided 14 letters which were important in helping you trace what happened. The same treatment applies to newspaper articles. In the footnotes or endnotes, you should cite the individual articles and issues of a newspaper. In the bibliography, you would list only the newspaper itself, not the individual issues or articles; you can use the annotation to explain that you used X number of days of the newspaper for your research.

HOW MANY SOURCES SHOULD I HAVE FOR MY ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY?

We can't tell you a specific number of sources, as that will vary by the topic and by the resources to which you have reasonable access. For some topics, such as the Civil War or many 20th-century US topics, there are many sources available. For other topics, such as those in ancient history or non-US history, there likely are far fewer sources available. The more good sources you have, the better, but don't pad your bibliography. Only list items which you actually use; if you looked at a source but it didn't help you at all, don't list it in your bibliography.

You do need to find both primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources help you to put your topic in context, that is, to see how your topic relates to the big picture and to understand its long-term causes and consequences. Primary sources help you develop your own interpretation and make your project lively and personal.

As much as possible, your research should be balanced, considering the viewpoints of all relevant groups. That means different perspectives, different genders, different nations, different socioeconomic/ethnic/religious groups, etc. What balanced means will vary depending on your topic.