

National History Day Historical Papers

What is a historical paper?

A paper is the traditional form of presenting historical research. A History Day paper is not simply a biography or a book report. It is a grammatically correct and well-written historical argument. Various types of creative writing (for example, fictional diaries, poems, etc.) are permitted, but must conform to all general and category rules.



The Basic Framework

- Must be completed as an individual. No group papers.
- No less than 1,500 words, no more than 2,500 words (about 6-10 pages).
- Contains citations to document work (footnotes, endnotes, or other internal documentation).
- **Be sure to check the *Contest Rulebook* for additional requirements and guidelines.**

Why Should I Choose the Paper Category?

Creating a History Day paper can be a rewarding experience and can be a successful way to communicate an argument about a topic. You will especially enjoy the paper category if you like to write and can express your ideas well through writing. The paper category is also great because you need very little visual evidence to support your argument, unlike a documentary. Since you cannot create a group paper for NHD, you also have to be willing to work alone.

It's important to remember that projects in the paper category must be completed and submitted in advance of History Day competitions, usually one to two weeks before the event takes place. This will give judges time to read your paper in advance of your interview. While it may be a challenge to complete the project before students in other categories, you will be far more relaxed than your fellow students the night before the competition.

History Day Paper Formatting

The National History Day Rulebook provides specific formatting guidelines for paper entries. Pay special attention to the following requirements:

- Papers must be typed, computer printed, or legibly handwritten in ink.
- Print papers on plain, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper with 1-inch margins on all sides.
- Pages must be numbered consecutively and double-spaced.
- Pages must be single-sided.
- Papers must be stapled in the top left corner and should not be enclosed in any cover or binder.
- The title page should list your title, name, and division/category only.
- No illustrations are permitted on the title page.
- It's best to use a font that is easy to read, such as Arial or Times New Roman, and an average-size font (10, 11, or 12 point).

It may look like quite a list of rules, but following these guidelines will help make sure your paper looks as polished and professional as possible!



NHD Paper Writing Process

Creating a paper for History Day is similar to other research papers you have written and generally falls into three basic steps:

1. Collection of Information

The process you will go through to collect information for a paper is the same as for all other History Day categories. The information you collect will form the basis for your entire paper. See the *NHD in Wisconsin Student Guide* for more information on **research** and **note taking**.

2. Organization of Information

The organization of information is especially important to create a successful historical paper. This begins with the **analysis** of your research and development of your **argument** or thesis statement. You can then begin to divide your research into different categories and draft an **outline**. Your outline is important as it is the roadmap for your entire project. Remember that each section in your outline (and in your final paper) should help support and prove your thesis.

3. Presentation of the topic in an interesting and convincing way

A historical research paper is more than just a story and is more interesting than just the presentation of one fact after another. To create a **structured argument**, each paragraph should have a topic sentence to focus the content of that paragraph. By following an outline that is connected to your thesis, you are going to build solid and convincing support for your argument. Additionally, what sorts of **supporting materials** can you incorporate into your paper? Are there quotes from historical actors that you can incorporate into your paper as evidence? Would a relevant map, photograph, or chart help your viewer to understand your argument? Finally, it is important to work through **multiple drafts** of your paper before you turn the final copy in to a competition or your teacher. Think critically about your paper and ask for feedback from others. Do you have a clear argument? Is your paper well-organized? Have you checked for spelling and grammatical errors?



NOTE: There are many books available on how to write research papers and you may find it helpful to look at one or more of them before you begin. Ask your history or English teacher to suggest some useful guides.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Paper Category

How do I count words in a historical paper?

Each word or number in the text of the paper counts as one word. The word limit does not apply to: notes, annotated bibliography, illustration captions, and supplemental/appendix material.

May I include an appendix in my paper?

Yes, but appendix material must be directly referenced in the text of the paper. Extensive supplemental materials are inappropriate. Use of appendices should be very limited and may include photographs, maps, charts and graphs.

May I include illustrations in my paper?

Yes, illustrations (such as photographs, maps, charts, and graphs) can be included in your paper. However, it's important that all supplemental material is directly tied to the content of your paper and that illustrations effectively help you to prove your argument. They should not just be used for decoration.

May I include other elements—such as an exhibit board or PowerPoint—with my paper?

No, in choosing the paper category you are limited to submitting only your written paper and supporting materials (annotated bibliography and optional appendix). No other elements are permitted.

Is creative writing permitted as a historical paper?

Yes, you can submit various forms of creative writing, such as fictional diaries or poems. Remember, however, that all paper entries must still conform to category rules. Most importantly, all papers must convey and support a historical argument. Look at the NHD criteria for a paper to see how you can combine a creative style of writing with historical research and analysis.

Annotated Bibliographies and Citations

The annotated bibliography and the citations in your paper work together to show your reader the research that you have done and to demonstrate how this research has influenced your argument. Understanding bibliographies and citations and successfully incorporating them into a research paper will be a skill that is necessary through middle school, high school, college, and beyond.

Annotated Bibliographies

The bibliography is a list of sources you have consulted in creating your paper. This listing of every source that contributed to your project will be stapled to the end of your paper. Each source will be annotated, which is a brief description of how that source was useful to your research. Keep a **working bibliography** to track the sources you have used throughout your research process. It will be very challenging, if not impossible, to try and remember this information once you have finished your project.

Refer to the NHD in Wisconsin Student Guide and a style manual for MLA or Turabian (the accepted NHD citation styles) for additional information on creating this document.

- Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*
- Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*

Citations

Citations are used within the paper to show the origins of ideas or quotations presented in the paper. History Day students can use several different styles of citations – footnotes, endnotes or parenthetical citations – depending on the citation style they choose (MLA or Turabian).

What is a citation?

Your historical paper will be created using the evidence and ideas created by other researchers or historical actors. Citations are a writer's explanations that ideas or quotations presented in the paper are not their own. Citations not only give credit to the originators of the ideas, but also point out the historical evidence in support of your argument about the past.



NOTE: The failure to acknowledge the origin of an idea or a quote is the equivalent to using someone else's work and claiming it as your own. This is plagiarism and can have serious consequences!

Usually citations occur in three situations:

1. **Quoting a Primary Source:** An example of this would be including a selection from a speech or interview in your paper.
2. **Quoting a Secondary Source:** If you include a direct quotation in your paper from someone else (such as a book) you must cite it.
3. **Paraphrasing a Secondary Source:** Even if you change the author's ideas into your own words you must cite where you found this information when you include it in your paper.



NOTE: Footnotes and endnotes can also be used to provide further explanation for your paper. If there is an idea that requires additional explanation, but that explanation would interrupt the flow of your text, you can discuss it in a footnote. Please note, however, that extensive footnotes should not be used to get around the word limit.

What do I put in a citation?

Citations are brief and provide only enough information to guide the reader to the correct complete reference in the annotated bibliography.

- **Parenthetical citations** usually include the author's last name and page number.
- For the first time you reference a book in a **footnote or endnote**, you usually include the author's name, title, publishing information, date, and page. For each time you create a footnote or endnote for that source after that, your citation can be shorter, usually just the author's last name and page number.



NOTE: The requirements and formatting for parenthetical citations, footnotes or endnotes will vary depending on the style guide you are using (MLA or Turabian) and the type of source you are referencing (book, article, interview, etc.). **Be sure to refer to the appropriate guide for more information!**

Annotated Bibliographies and Citations

Where do I Place Citations?

You have several options for placement of citations depending on personal preference and the style manual you are using. You will select from one of the following:

Parenthetical Citations: Parenthetical citations are placed in parentheses at the end of the sentence where they are referenced.

Footnotes: For footnote citations, a superscript number is placed at the end of the sentence that refers to a citation at the bottom of the page. Most word processing programs can format footnotes automatically.

Endnotes: For endnote citations, a superscript number is placed at the end of the sentence that refers to a citation on a separate page at the end of the paper. Most word processing programs can format endnotes automatically.



NOTE: While placing citations in parentheses in the text is permissible according to the MLA style rules, many readers prefer footnotes since they do not interrupt the flow of the text. Most History Day students will use footnotes or endnotes.

National History Day is an academic enrichment program and each year more than half a million students participate in schools across the country. National History Day (NHD) is a great opportunity for students to become historians as they investigate a topic in which they are interested.

Historical research is important in helping students to develop skills that will help them achieve good scores on tests as well as develop habits they will need for the rest of their lives (Kasperek, Malone and Schock 2004, viii).

For students, the impact of the program goes far beyond school. According to Stephen Frese, 2006 NHD Grand Prize Winner, "It's true:

History Day is not just a day. It is an experience that can change your life."¹

At this moment, students across the nation are creating documentaries, exhibits, papers, performances and web sites to share their ideas with others. The most popular presentations category is exhibits.² Many

students creating projects in this category work hard on the visual impact of

1. National History Day, "2006 National History Day Annual Report," 15 July 2008, <<http://www.nhd.org/images/uploads/library/34726p1web.pdf>>.

This sample page should help you understand how parenthetical citations, footnotes, and endnotes look in a paper. Remember that you should not use all three methods at once. You will **pick one** method, according your style guide, and use only that for your citations.

This parenthetical citation tells you the page where the author found the information (page viii) and gives you just enough information to find the complete citation in the bibliography.

This small number refers readers to the footnote at the bottom of the page.

This small number refers to an endnote at the end of the paper.

Endnotes

1.:
2.:
3.:
4.:
5.:

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 is 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.



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 – 60% (At 60%, 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.



Relation to Theme – 20%

- 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.



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.



National History Day in Wisconsin
Wisconsin Historical Society

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