



Tips for National History Day in Colorado Project Formats

Exhibit

1. Utilize Headings: Exhibits are generally one of the most common project formats, particularly among first-time History Day participants. In order to make your exhibit stand apart, organization is important and headings are absolutely essential to this. While there are no required headings for exhibits, viewers should be able to easily find the thesis, background information, context, short- and long-term impacts, and the conclusion.

2. Consider Including a Timeline: Context can be difficult to demonstrate, especially if some contextual events do not relate directly to a student's topic. A good way to remedy this challenge is by including a timeline. Even if some contextual events do not explicitly impact a particular topic, their inclusion in a timeline helps situate that topic in context.

3. Connect Images and Quotes to Text: One of the most exciting parts of doing historical research is the discovery of primary source photos and quotation, etc. It can be tempting to try and squish as many of these on your board as possible, but they should instead be carefully selected. Consider placing photos, quotations, newspaper headlines, etc. next to corresponding textual evidence to reinforce your points.

4. Make Sure Your Exhibit is Both Visually and Historically Sound: While organization, creativity, and neatness are all important aspects of creating a history day exhibit, conducting solid historical research and analysis is still the most important factor in a History Day project.

5. Don't "Junk" It Up: To quote Tim "Mr. History" Hoogland, the director of Minnesota History Day, "Don't junk it up!" Creativity and visual primary sources are important to a History Day exhibit, but often, less is more. Don't cross the line from eye-catching to distracting.

Website

1. Exploit Your Resources: The website is intended to allow students to integrate digital media to support their thesis. If you choose to utilize this particular format, consider including a video clip, slideshow, and/or music to enhance the viewing experience.

2. Increase User-Friendliness: Viewers of your website should be able to navigate it without your instruction. Make sure that your tabs provide a clear and concise roadmap of your website's pages so that all of your information can be easily accessed and found.

3. Reinforce Your Argument Through Many Mediums: Support your written information with your music, pictures, videos, and website layout. The more mediums through which you reinforce your argument, the more compelling it will be. For example, if your project is about the expedition of Lewis and Clark, a map of their travels might be an attention-grabbing background. A misattributed visual of another exploration might be less appropriate and intriguing.

4. Make Your Website Legible: While eccentric fonts in crazy colors may be fun, they are generally hard to read and make your project look less professional. Choose fonts and colors that are easily read and consistent throughout your website.

5. Cover All Your Bases: The biggest and most common omissions in History Day websites are the annotated bibliography and process paper. These elements must be included in the website itself, not hyperlinked to an outside webpage. The bibliography and process paper should also be easy to find.

Documentary

1. Use a Variety of Images: Before you begin finalizing your documentary, make sure that you have compiled a wealth of images (and possible video clips) for your film. Viewers notice immediately if you reuse the same set of ten images over and over throughout your documentary. Catch their attention!

2. Make Sure Your Narration is Audibly Pleasing: When narrating a documentary, there are a few important things to remember. First, make sure you speak clearly and at a speed that can be understood—not too quickly or slowly. Second, the volume of the narration should be consistent throughout. Narrations should be loud enough to hear over your background music, but not too loud. Additionally, if you are doing a group doc and have multiple group members narrating, the volume should be consistent across individuals.

3. Be Sure to Include Credits AND an Annotated Bibliography: Be sure and include credits for ALL the images, clips, and quotations used in your documentary. Remember that the credits count toward then ten-minute time limit of your documentary. You also need to create a hard-copy annotated bibliography where you provide full citations and annotation. The documentary category requires BOTH, not the student’s choice of one or the other.

4. Select Appropriate Music: Music is crucial to enhancing any documentary, and it can sometimes make or break a viewing experience. If your topic took place in a time period with distinctive music, choosing a period piece should be a no-brainer. Popular, modern tunes are sometimes appropriate, but they should be selected carefully. 2014 national qualifier, Johnny Vazzani, nailed it when he selected Coldplay’s “Paradise” as the tune to complement his documentary about Amache, the Japanese Internment Camp that was located in Granada, Colorado.

5. Always Have a “Plan B”: Documentaries are perhaps the most susceptible to technical difficulty. You should practice running your technology at home before competing at a contest. Also, be sure and have at least one form of backup for screening your documentary. It’s a good idea to both upload your film to YouTube and have it loaded on a flash drive. Also consider bringing a personal device with your documentary on it, just in case.

Performance

1. Be Strategic With Your Props: Props should definitely include time-appropriate costumes and backgrounds, but you may be able to incorporate other important dynamics with props. For example, if the passage of time is crucial to your argument, you may be able to use cue cards with specific dates on them to illustrate that.

2. Practice Makes Perfect: Especially if you are a first-timer to the performance category, memorizing your lines is crucial. However, memorization is only the first step. You should practice continuously so that your lines become familiar. Familiarity will allow you to deliver your lines with dramatic effect, enhancing your performance.

3. The Devil is in the Details: The small things that may seem insignificant can make a good performance a great one. Effective interaction with props, stage entrances and exits, practicing an accent, and/or dynamic dialogue with group members can put a performance over the top.

4. Don't Neglect Your Scholarship: Performance may be perhaps the most difficult category to show-off how much research you have done. Be deliberate when writing your script about using direct quotations. You may also consider using an iconic image and newspaper headings as background images and/or props. Coupling these things with a polished annotated bibliography will show viewers that you didn't skimp on research.

5. Engage the Audience: The most compelling performances incorporate both dialogue and asides that communicate important points directly to the audience. Your “punch lines” may be best reinforced with an aside.

Paper

1. Spelling and Grammar Check! A paper is probably the easiest format to prevent typos and unnecessary grammar errors. It's absolutely essentially proofread your paper, but left Microsoft World do some of the heavy lifting for you! Don't submit before doing a spelling and grammar check!

2. Say What You Mean: Sometimes students get so caught up in trying to use flashy language and exciting synonyms that they fail to get their point across. The most important thing to remember is to say what you mean clearly and concisely.

3. Don't Neglect the Little Things: The paper category may not require a process paper or call for fancy graphics, but it does require a word count on the cover page, an annotated bibliography, and consistent in-text citations. Don't leave these out!

4. Go Back to the Basics: Students who select to compete in the paper category are often skilled writers, but that does not mean they should shy away from the basic mechanics of writing. When outlining paragraphs remember **MEAL: Main idea, Evidence, Analysis, Link**. Every paragraph you write should have a topic sentence that includes the main idea of the paragraph, evidence to support that idea, the author's analysis of that evidence, and a concluding sentence that links to the next paragraph.

5. Integrate Quotations Effectively: Topics with a wealth of textual evidence are best suited to the paper category. To show-off your research, integrate meaningful quotations into your writing. Quotations should not stand alone, but should be woven into the student's own writing. Don't forget to cite!