

From the Trenches

Advice from an NHD Veteran

The following bits of advice are offered by a high school junior who is preparing for her sixth year of NHD competition. She's been there...

- Come early...Check in can be stressful, especially for first-time competitors. Make sure you have ample time for navigation, set-up, and mental preparation.
- Have a game plan...If your project is an exhibit, paper, or website, you could end up with a lot of free time of your hands. Figure out a place to hang out until awards, a place to eat lunch, and bring something to do, like a book to read or a video game.
- Know thy enemy...Especially if you or someone with your group is competing in the documentary, exhibit, or performance categories. Go see a few entries when they are open to the public. Not only will you see what others have done, you might get ideas to improve your project if you move on to the next level.
- Practice makes perfect...On the way to the competition, practice with the sample judge interview questions, and come up with a few of your own. The more standard answers you have to standard questions, the more confident you'll be in your ability to think quickly and sound knowledgeable. And...there is nothing worse than having to tell a judge, "I don't know."
- Bond...This doesn't just apply to group entries. History Day is about having fun, not stressing out. Talk your chaperone into a pre-judging Starbucks run, or go see a movie together after your interview times. Plan a fun lunch or an activity near campus.
- Keep in touch...Make sure everyone has a cell phone, or travel in twos or threes so nobody is out of contact. Be sure all phone numbers are saved in everyone's phone (especially the chaperone's) in case someone gets separated from the herd. **BUT REMEMBER TO TURN THOSE PHONES OFF BEFORE JUDGING!**
- Keep it together...You may be walking a long way with your project, so pack it in a way that is convenient for carrying. Have a carrying case for all electronics, marked with a luggage tag with contact information for the owner (If it is school equipment, put the information of the person in charge). Make sure all students gather backpacks, purses, cell phones, jackets, etc. when leaving.
- Have a plan B...Make sure all technology has a back-up plan. While documentaries need to be on a DVD, bring the project on a jump drive, along with extra DVDs, in case you need to burn another copy. Be sure to have supplies handy for quick repairs to exhibit boards, costumes, props, etc. Anticipate the problems.
- History Day is what you make it...You have a choice. You can see NHD as a class assignment, or you can see it as a fun way to do something with a group of friends, and learn a little something along the way. The people who do the best at NHD are those who have fun with NHD. That attitude might even lead you to Nationals!