



Judge and Volunteer Handbook

National History Day in North Dakota

Updated 2022

Welcome to National History Day in North Dakota

Each year thousands of middle and high school students present their historical research projects in a series of competitions from the local level through to a national contest. First, students select and research a topic connected to an annual theme. Next, they choose to create an exhibit, documentary, performance, website, or research paper to share their work—similar to professional historians. Finally, these projects are presented at school, regional, state, and national contests where volunteer judges provide students with feedback on their work and recognize their achievements. Volunteers help make these annual contests a success. The goal of National History Day in North Dakota is to provide students with a valuable educational experience, regardless of whether they win prizes. While not every student will choose to become a historian, we hope they will all become lifelong history enthusiasts.

Why volunteer?

Volunteering with National History Day in North Dakota is a lot of fun. It is exciting to talk to students about their work. Volunteers play a huge role in supporting student interest in their topics, their research, and their projects. Mentors and judges help recognize student achievements and provide valuable feedback. Not only do volunteers have a fun experience working with students, they usually learn something new about history and help support their community in the process.

What do volunteers do?

There are a variety of roles and commitment levels open to volunteers. Volunteers can spend as little as a few hours on a single day as a judge or a room monitor or several weeks helping to organize school and regional contests. Some of the tasks volunteers help with include staffing registration tables, giving gallery tours, stuffing envelopes, printing certificates, and so much more. While there are a variety of roles for volunteers to serve in at any contest, including mentors, room monitors, and advisory committee members, the single biggest need will always be for judges. To learn more about these and other volunteer opportunities, contact state coordinator, Danielle Stuckle, at dstuckle@nd.gov or 701-328-2794.

Photo Disclaimer

By participating in National History Day in North Dakota, you consent to having your image recorded for informational or publicity purposes. If you object to having your image recorded for any such potential use, you must inform the contest organizers, who will make every effort to honor your wishes.

Mentors and Coaches

Educators, librarians, archivists, curators, historians, and other researchers have a profound impact on the success of National History Day in North Dakota. Mentors and coaches help students learn to think like historians. These volunteers help them navigate libraries, archives, and museums. At a research open house, they help students understand the vast resources available to them besides what is online. Mentors at an open house might do anything from give facility tours to show students how to use special collections and databases. They help students find relevant primary and secondary sources. Mentors also help students select topics and narrow them down to a historical argument (thesis statement). They might review a student's research progress and provide other feedback. Some mentors help virtually rather than in person to help History Day staff answer student questions in a timely manner.

Serving as a mentor or coach is a great way for pre-service teachers and other college students to become involved in National History Day in North Dakota. Dates and locations for research open house events are determined annually, based on demand.

Advisory Committee

National History Day in North Dakota has an advisory committee that includes educators, historians, librarians, archivists, college students, parents, and other interested volunteers from across the state. This committee is flexible to allow people to get involved to the degree that works for their personal schedules and interest levels. The purpose of the committee is to serve as History Day ambassadors, provide staff with feedback, help organize contests, and help identify support (more than money, but that helps too). This is an informal committee, rather than a formal board, and committee members can opt out at any time.

Room Monitors

Room monitors ensure History Day competitions run smoothly. They have an important role in supervising and maintaining order during competitions. They also help calm nervous students by offering a smile and a kind word. The time commitment for a contest is generally about five to six hours, including a volunteer orientation. The duties of a room monitor vary but usually include:

- Create a welcoming environment in and around all the spaces used for the contest. Keep conversations positive and energized. Let students know how happy we are that they are participating in History Day.
- Serve as a connection or a liaison to contest staff. Help get questions answered in a timely manner or find someone who can.
- Ensure the schedule is followed. Judges should start and end each session on time. Students should arrive on time and be ready to go when their judges are.
- Maintain low noise levels in and around judging areas.
- Rooms for judging exhibits, papers, and websites are closed to the public until announced otherwise.
- Documentaries and performances are open to the public. Audience members should only enter and leave between presentations and should turn their cell phones off.
- Try to help calm as many nerves as possible; this is a big day!

Judges

Volunteers with a variety of professional experiences and backgrounds have a huge role to play in the success of National History Day in North Dakota. The only prerequisites are to enjoy working with students, have enthusiasm, and a passion for history. You do not need to be a historian, or even to know much about specific research areas, to serve as a judge. No one is an expert on all the topics presented at a history day contest. This is an opportunity for students to be the experts. Judges work in teams of two to three people. Newer judges are paired with more experienced judges. Veteran judges serve as team leads, mentor new judges, and help keep things running smoothly. There is an orientation session before each contest where new volunteers can become acquainted with the judging process and returning judges can learn more about any changes to the program from previous years.

The most important part of any entry is the research itself—rather than the quality of the resulting project. Focus on the strength of the historical argument (the thesis statement), how well students support their arguments with evidence, and the overall quality of the research they're presenting. These projects are students' opportunities to demonstrate understanding of the basic elements of historical thinking. They should be able to explain how they narrowed their research topic, their understanding of the topic's historical context, how they developed their argument, how they found and analyzed evidence that supports their argument, and that they considered a variety of perspectives. Be careful to judge all projects evenly regardless of how much you might know about different subject areas.

Judges generally evaluate four to eight projects per contest, depending on the number of entries for each category. Judges are provided with an evaluation form where they write comments for the students about how balanced their research is and whether they provided a solid argument for their topic. Judges should familiarize themselves with the [evaluation sheets](#), the [annual theme](#), and the rules for the category they will be judging. The [contest rule book](#), was most recently updated in 2020.

Always keep in mind that the goal of National History Day in North Dakota is to provide young learners with a positive experience, regardless of whether they win. Ideally, all students should have a positive discussion of their work with the judges and get meaningful written feedback. As a judge, you are the face of History Day. It is important that interviews and judging be fair and consistent. History Day is likely the most difficult research project a student has completed. Talk to students in a way that allows them to feel proud of the work they have done. Remember to smile and be encouraging.

How to Judge History Day Projects

The process outlined below is typical for most categories. Specific rules for each category vary. Be sure to read any special instructions when reviewing the contest rules.

Greet First, greet and welcome the students. Introduce yourself, shake hands, and try to set them at ease. Give them a brief overview of the interview process. Avoid asking them where they are from, where they go to school, or what their backgrounds are.

Judges for the website and paper categories will have already seen the projects by the contest date and will only need to interview students. Students in the exhibit, documentary, and performance categories should provide each judge with a copy of their process paper and annotated bibliography. Students in the performance category should set up while the judges review their written materials.

Read Skim the process papers and annotated bibliographies. Keep at least one copy of the written material for your team to review later in the judges' room. Pay special attention to the annotated bibliography. Bibliographies should be divided into two main sections: primary and secondary sources. There is no required number of sources students need to include. However, they do have to look at a variety of sources related to their topic and include various perspectives on the subject. Students should use MLA or Chicago/Turabian citation styles. Whichever style they choose, they should be consistent in their formatting. Entries should have a strong historical argument (thesis statement). A historical argument is a roadmap for a project. They are usually two to three sentences and include an argument (interpretation or perspective) on what the project is about. Everything included in the project should support the argument/thesis.

View Judges for research papers and websites will have access to their projects to review them prior to the contest date. Exhibit judges can begin reviewing the project at any time they are ready. For documentaries and performances, signal to the students when they can begin. One judge should be assigned to monitor time. Each performance will have five minutes to set up, ten to show the project, and five for the interviewed and to remove their props. The next entry may set up while an interview is in progress.

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Interview After viewing the project, the process paper, and the annotated bibliography, interview students about their work. This is more like a job interview rather than a formal oral presentation with a beginning, middle, and end. Judges should ask probing, open-ended questions about the entries, but students will still do most of the talking. For group projects, make sure that each student has a chance to answer questions. The interview is not the time for judges to provide direct feedback and suggestions for improvement. Instead, judges should take lots of notes. The evaluation form with judges' comments is the primary delivery method for feedback and suggestions. If there is a rule infraction or factual error, note it on the comment form instead of pointing it out in the interview. If you feel that the student should have an opportunity to defend the point, broach the subject tactfully.

The sole purpose of the interview is to encourage an active dialogue between judges and students on the process of historical research. It is important to keep the interview positive and meaningful. History Day might be the most difficult project they have ever completed. We want them to walk away with the best possible experience. Please converse with students in a way that allows them to feel proud of the work they have done. Many students are very sensitive to judges' moods and attitudes. They feel crushed if you seem bored, indifferent, or negative. Remember to thank them for participating in National History Day in North Dakota.

Ranking Projects Return to the judges' meeting room to review each entry with your team. National History Day uses **consensus** judging. This means your team will work together to rank the top entries, rather than assigning numeric scores. This streamlines the process and avoids the need to spend time calculating scores. The overall ranking must be supported by the whole judging team. Judges' check marks in the columns do not need to be identical, but they should be in the same range. Avoid using the "exemplary" column excessively unless the whole team agrees. The written comments should also be consistent with the rest of the team. They shouldn't necessarily be the same, but they also should not contradict each other. Judges' decisions are final.

To keep the day's schedule moving along smoothly, rank the top entries first so they can be turned into the contest coordinator as soon as possible. The contest coordinator will let you know the specific number of projects you are selecting to move on to the next level. Judges can continue to write comments and suggestions on the forms after rankings have been submitted, as time allows. Some judges only need a few minutes while others may take an hour or more to organize their notes and complete their comments.

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Writing Comments Each judge completes an evaluation form for each project. These forms are given to students so they can use the feedback to understand how they can improve their research and their project. This helps students who are advancing make appropriate changes to compete at higher levels. Students who are not advancing want to understand why their project was not selected.

Students appreciate constructive criticism that helps them understand what they can do better. It is common for judges to use the “sandwich” critique method which softens constructive criticism by placing it between two positive comments. Critical comments are best phrased as suggestions (“you may want to,” “did you consider,” or “other issues important to this topic are”). Generic comments such as “good job” or “well done, keep up the good work” don’t tell students anything solid they can use to improve their work.

Contest Rules Judges will take into consideration rule infractions in their final rankings. There is a difference between minor and major infractions. Judges may choose to note a minor infraction (such as an error on the title page), on the evaluation form but do have to reduce the entry’s ranking. Some infractions, however, can give an entry an unfair advantage over others. Major infractions include things like violating size or time limits. These types of infractions should be taken into consideration, and the final ranking should be reduced accordingly. Infractions for otherwise eligible projects should be corrected before the entry moves on to the next level of competition. Take a close look at the “Rules for All Categories” and the “Individual Category Rules” in the [National History Day Rulebook](#) for specific rules for each category. Plagiarism or reusing a previous year’s entry will result in disqualification of the entry. If you suspect either of these things, inform the contest coordinator as soon as possible and let them handle the situation.

Final Rounds If necessary, one member from each judging team may have to stay for a final round of judging, depending on the number of entries in a category. The contest coordinator will let you know the specific number of projects you are selecting to move on to the next level. At the state contest, the top two entries from each division (age group) and category (both project type and individual or group) are eligible to move on to the national contest.

Judging Criteria

Historical Quality

80%

- **Historical Argument (Thesis or Claim):** Historical argument is consistently supported by analysis and evidence.
- **Theme:** Annual theme is consistently clear and connected to the topic in the project and argument.
- **Wide Research:** Bibliography includes an extensive variety of types of available sources.
- **Primary Sources:** Primary sources consistently support the historical argument.
- **Historical Context:** Relevant connections to the topic's time and place are consistently made and analyzed (economic, political, intellectual, physical, social, and cultural setting).
- **Multiple Perspectives:** Varied perspectives are consistently included throughout the project.
- **Historical Accuracy:** Historical information is consistently accurate, credible, and without critical omissions.
- **Significance in History:** The impact of the topic is consistently analyzed in the conclusion. Students should examine the meaning and long-and short-term impacts of the topic, not simply describe it. Entries should reflect a historical perspective such as the causes and effects of an event or the relationship of a local topic to larger events and vice versa.

Clarity of Presentation

20%

- **Student Voice:** Student analysis is consistently clear and balanced between their own words/ideas and supporting evidence. Conclusions are original and distinct from the research. This is not a book report.
- **Process papers and annotated bibliographies** are included and clearly organized. Process papers include word count on the title page. Bibliography is separated into primary and secondary sources. Annotations do not exceed two to three sentences.
- Entries meet time, size, and word requirements.

Tips to Remember

- **The medium is not the message.** The research is the most significant aspect of a project. Avoid giving "cute" points to flashy projects.
- The sole purpose of the interview is to encourage an active dialogue between judges and students on the process of historical research.
- Projects stand alone. Don't judge what students say in an interview over what they have actually completed for their project.
- Remember that students are naturally nervous during their interviews!

Sample Interview Questions

Try to ask students at least three to five questions, or as many as time allows. Be consistent and ask mostly the same questions for each entry. Give students time to answer; they may need to formulate a response. If they ask you to repeat a question, try rephrasing it or breaking apart a multi-part question. Judges are welcome to ask relevant questions about the process or topic that are not listed here. These are just suggestions to help get you started.

1. Begin by asking students an easy question:
 - How did you choose this topic?
 - How does your topic relate to this year's theme?
 - Why did you select this category (website, documentary, exhibit, paper, or performance)?
 - For groups: Tell us about the role each of you had in the development of your project.
2. Move on to higher level questions that help students demonstrate how they analyzed their topic and related it to broader themes in history:
 - What is your historical argument (thesis)? Did it change over the course of your research process?
 - What was the most significant thing you learned about your topic? What surprised you the most?
 - Why was your topic important in history? How did it influence history? What were the consequences? What do you think was the single most important factor that caused your topic to happen?
 - How did you do your research? What was your approach/process? Is there anything you wish you had done differently or would change if you could?
 - What primary sources did you find? Where/how did you find them? How did your primary sources help you to better understand your topic? What was your most important or favorite source? What websites did you use? What printed sources did you use?
 - Do you think you presented multiple sides of your topic? How? Did any of your sources provide conflicting evidence? How did you deal with this? Were some of the sources more credible than others?
 - What difficulties or challenges did you face while working on this project? How did you overcome them?
 - If students used a local history topic, can they relate this to the larger context of what was going on in the rest of the country or world? And vice versa—if students used a national or international topic, can they relate this to what kind of impact this might have had on their local community?

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3. End the interview with a question that allows the student to bring up any other information they want to share:
 - Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we haven't discussed yet?
4. Make sure to thank them for participating in National History Day in North Dakota.

Inappropriate Questions and Comments:

Avoid asking students where they go to school, what their cultural/religious backgrounds are, or how much money they spent on their project.

If the student has a topic in a content area in which you are familiar, then go ahead and ask appropriate questions, but be careful not to overshadow their role as the expert. This is not a captive audience for your insights on a particular topic. Do not lecture students. This is their day to be the experts

What Is Your Judge Profile?

Good judges embody these behaviors:

Encourager A great History Day judge introduces him- or herself, asks thoughtful questions, smiles, and lets the students talk. If it's a group project, judges should make sure that each student has a chance to answer questions.

Inquirer Good judges ask questions that show they want to hear what students have to say. Open-ended questions allow students to expand, describe, analyze, and display enthusiasm about their project. Asking a variety of questions allows students to talk about different aspects of their topic and gives them opportunities to bring up new and interesting information.

Novelist Detailed, constructive comments on evaluation forms provide ideas on project strengths as well as areas for improvement. This is the most important feedback students receive. Comments that demonstrate thoughtful consideration of the research and project are as good as gold to History Day students.

Team Player Excellent History Day judges make sure all the judges have equal opportunities to talk during the interview process. They work together to reach a consensus about which projects are moving on, which aren't, and why. They check with their fellow judges to make sure that all the ratings and written comments on evaluation forms are consistent. It can be confusing and disheartening to students if they receive conflicting or unnecessarily repetitive feedback.

Good judges avoid these interview pitfalls:

Wanderer Students *are* experts on their chosen topic, but it doesn't mean they are experts about everything. Asking students questions about something unrelated to their project is both unfair and discouraging. Students should understand the general context of history surrounding a topic but be reasonable in your expectations for their breadth of knowledge.

Lecturer A judge may be one of the foremost experts on a student's topic—but that doesn't give them license to lecture the student about the topic and point out errors, missed analysis, or suggest different conclusions. Please remember that students work for months on their projects, and that they are **students**—not professors.

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- Dominator** Judges serve on teams, and it's important that each judge ask at least one question. One judge may be particularly enthusiastic about a project, but think of the interview as a conversation, with all parties taking part.
- Gusher** Judges sometimes are so effusive in their praise for a project that students leave the interview convinced they've won. Be careful to remain neutral and try to make sure you use consistent wording and phrasing with all students.
- Accuser** Judges sometimes come across projects that for one reason or another, set off alarm bells. Maybe the project is so professional that it's hard to believe a student did it. Maybe different parts of the narrative seem to be written by different people. Maybe students are having a hard time answering basic questions. Instead of confronting students with suspicions, judges should complete the interview, asking questions that try to address their concerns, and then report any misgivings to contest coordinators. Please do not accuse students directly of cheating, plagiarizing, or otherwise taking shortcuts. This is a matter for the contest coordinator and the student's coach to address.
- Blurter** Saying something about students' gender, ethnicity, culture, and appearance is completely unacceptable. Please, please, please think before you speak. How might a student interpret your comment? How about their parents or teacher? How would you feel if the same thing was said to you? Be thoughtful and deliberate in your interactions with students and keep your focus on the research project.

Thank You Judges and Volunteers!

It is hard to put into words how important our judges and other volunteers are to running a smooth, efficient, fun, and engaging history day contest. Your gift of time and energy is critical to the success of this program. The reading, writing, research, and historical thinking skills students develop by participating in this program will stay with them and guide them for the rest of their lives. While not every student will choose to become a historian, we hope they will all become lifelong history enthusiasts.

Thank you.

