

Every field of study has its own vocabulary. The key terms in the *NHD Contest Rule Book* and evaluation rubrics reflect the language used by historians. This document summarizes the essential definitions and reminders for in the judging process.

Annual Theme: The “big idea” that connects all National History Day projects for a contest year. Each student and entry must connect to the annual theme.

- **Theme-specific resources:** Look for the year-specific guidance from NHD on how to assess the strength of a theme connection.

Dramatic Arc (Performances): The path that a story or narrative of a performance follows, often including a beginning, middle, and end of the story.

Historical Accuracy: For NHD, historical accuracy includes three parts: Accurate (free from mistakes or errors in historical information), credible (the information is reasonable to believe), and without critical omissions (the project doesn't leave out information needed for a complete understanding).

- **Judges are not experts:** Judges are not expected to be experts in each topic, or to provide a thorough fact checking. Identify major errors, fact check if necessary.

Historical Argument (Thesis or Claim): A historical argument states the central point or focus of a project in two or three sentences. It is sometimes called a thesis or claim. A historical argument comes from carefully analyzing evidence from the past. It must make a meaningful connection to the theme and show why a topic is significant in history.

- **Does not need to be labeled:** The argument must be incorporated in a project and be clear to those who read or view it. However, labeling the historical argument in or on a project is not required.

Historical Context: Historical context is the larger setting in which a topic took place, and may include relevant economic, social, intellectual, religious, cultural, or political conditions of the place and time.

- **Relevant historical context:** Due to word, size, and time limits, students will have made tough decisions on what information to include. Think about what historical context is relevant in order for the student to prove their argument, which may differ from what you, personally, may be interested to know.

Multiple Perspectives: A perspective is one point of view, one person's experience, or side of the story. Multiple perspectives are present when a topic is explored from more than one point of view, mostly those with different opinions.

- **Consider the project and research:** Multiple perspectives may appear in both the project and the research.
- **Varies by topic:** While multiple perspectives are present in any topic, the role they played or the degree of difference in view will vary. Multiple perspectives may be more stark in topics like military battles, and more nuanced in others, such as differing tactics to gain women the right to vote.
- **Do not need to be represented equally:** Each perspective does not need to be given equal weight in a project. Students will decide what perspectives, and how much discussion of them, is necessary to support their argument.
- **Use caution:** Students may encounter historical perspectives that do not align with their beliefs or values. It may be challenging for students to balance identifying differing points of view (explaining what someone believed, why, and the impact that had in history) with condoning it. Take care when addressing these issues in your written comments.

Primary Source: Primary sources are connected to an event by time or participation. They may include, but are not limited to, eyewitness accounts, letters, speeches, diaries, images, artifacts newspaper articles, oral history interviews with people from the time, or oral traditions.

- **Is it primary or secondary:** Unedited copies of primary materials found on credible internet sites or in print should be classified as primary sources. If only a portion of the primary material, such as an excerpt or a quote, is included in the source, it must be cited as a source within a source and categorized with secondary sources.
- **Judging Note:** Different topics, by their very nature, have different types and quantities of available sources. Judges should calibrate their expectations based on what may exist and what a student may be able to access.

Secondary Source: Secondary sources are created after and about a historical event. They are written by credible (trustworthy) authors, such as professional historians, and reflect thorough research and analysis. They may include, but are not limited to, history textbooks, articles in professional journals and books written by historians, biographies, or articles found on credible internet sites.

- **They're not less important:** Secondary sources are not less important to a well-rounded bibliography. The knowledge students gain from secondary sources forms the foundation of their research and is key to developing historical context.

Significance in History: Significance refers to the impact or consequences of a topic, both in the short term and the long term.

- **So what:** Think about if a student answered the question “So what, why does this matter?” with their historical argument and project.
- **Global versus local:** The impact of a topic may range anywhere from local to global. The success of a project is not determined by the scale of impact of the topic.

Student Voice: Student voice refers to a student's ideas and analysis. For NHD, this is judged in the clarity of presentation part of the rubric. How effectively are these ideas presented and supported in the project? The student's ideas should be clear and in balance with supporting evidence, such as quoted material from primary or secondary sources.

- **Look for:** Look to see how easy it is to identify the students' ideas in the project itself. Are those ideas in balance with, or overwhelmed by, supporting evidence?

Wide Research: Wide research refers to the variety of types of sources (books, articles, credible websites, diaries, photographs, newspaper articles, letters, etc.) that are used in the research. Using a wide variety of both primary and secondary sources makes an entry stronger.

- **Quality over quantity:** Instead of looking at the total number of sources, judges should assess the overall variety of source types (e.g. are there primary sources beyond photographs?) and the quality of those sources (e.g. are the websites credible?).
- **Differences by topic:** Different topics, by their very nature, have different types and quantities of available sources. Judges should calibrate their expectations accordingly.
- **Web-based sources:** For web-based sources, look beyond the website itself to think about the type of source. Many online archives and databases include more varieties of sources beyond just web pages, such as newspapers, documents, photographs, etc.