Orientation for National History Day Judges

This is a generic orientation outline used at the state event and at several regional events in Wisconsin. Event coordinators can add to, delete from, or otherwise adjust this outline as needed.

A. WELCOME AND THANK YOU!

- **Judging is key to the success of the History Day program!** The goal of NHD is to provide students with a valuable educational experience, whether or not they win a prize. The students you will meet today have been working for months on their projects and will be excited and nervous about meeting with you. Your interactions with them will determine the success of their experience.

B. THE BASICS

Your job today can be summarized in four steps
1. View projects
2. Interview students
3. Rank entries
4. Write comments

- Judges work on **panels of 2-3**, with one head judge, or captain, who is responsible for turning in the ranking sheet.

- History Day uses **consensus judging**, meaning your panel will work together to rank entries instead of assigning numeric scores.

- First, you will **view each entry and interview the students who created it**. (If you are judging papers or web sites, you have already seen the projects and will only interview students.)

- You will have **15-20 minutes** with each entry, depending on your category. Entries are scheduled back-to-back, so please stay on time!

- The interview is an important learning experience for the student, and an opportunity for judges to clarify any uncertainties they may have about the content of the project or possible rule infractions. However, **judging is based on the PROJECT, not the interview**. The interview only affects a project's ranking when judges have discovered a rule infraction or when it clears up a misunderstanding the judges may have had.

- As you view entries, **take notes** on their strengths, distinguishing elements, and things that could be improved. Notes will make ranking entries and writing comments easier.

- All entries **MUST** be accompanied by an **annotated bibliography**. Collect at least one from each project. Annotations should explain how the student used each source. Primary sources and secondary sources should be separated.

- **Primary sources are connected to an event by time or participation.** If you believe a source is incorrectly classified as primary or secondary, ask the students about it in the interview. Sources can sometimes fall into a gray area.

- In every category except papers, judges will receive a **process paper** for each entry. The process paper provides a brief description of the student's research process. Collect at least one copy so you can look back on it later.

- After you have interviewed all the students, you will **meet privately** with your fellow judges to rank entries and write comments.

C. THE PROJECTS

Exhibits: Exhibits should resemble museum exhibits. They should contain only 500 student-composed words, including timelines, titles, captions, etc. *(Explain what judges should do if they suspect an entry is over the word limit – count themselves, ask another volunteer, etc.).*

Documentaries: Documentary entries are often like shorter versions of the programs you see on the History Channel or PBS, but they can also be slide shows or PowerPoint presentations. (Remember, don't judge on glitz!!) Documentaries should utilize a variety of media – they are NOT performances on videotape. There is a 10-minute time limit, and one judge should be assigned to monitor this. Each entry will have 5 minutes to set up, 10 to show they project, and 5 to be interviewed and take down their things. The next entry may set up while an interview is in progress. *(If your event is open to the public or other students, explain when the audience will be permitted to enter and when judges should close the doors.)*

Performances: Performances follow the same procedure as documentaries. They must be original. Performers should display stage presence, including clear and audible voices; costumes do not need to be elaborate or authentic but should consider the topic. One judge should be assigned the task of timing each performance. There is a 10-minute time limit. Please take into consideration nerves, forgotten lines, and audience applause or laughter when timing the performance.

Papers: Paper judges have already read their papers ahead of time. Now you'll interview the students. *(Explain the process for turning in papers, and whether students will receive comments that judges write on the paper.)*

Web Sites: Web site judges have already viewed projects. As with papers, you will only interview the students today.

D. THE INTERVIEW

These are **young** historians and most will be very nervous about meeting with you, so please do your best to make them comfortable.

- **Smile** and welcome them. Introduce yourself!

- **This is their time to shine.** Even if you are an expert on their topic, this is their time to share what they know about the topic. Please save your comments for the comment sheet.

- **Show Interest!** Be attentive, ask good questions. Use the sample questions (in your judging instructions) for examples.

- **Compliment without comparison.** Compliments will make interviewees feel more at ease. However, students will be eager to read meaning into any comment you make, so be careful not to comment on the quality of their work in relation to other projects.

- **Don't point out errors during the interview.** 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 be given an opportunity to defend the point, please broach the subject tactfully.

E. RANKING PROJECTS

- You will be choosing _____ projects to move on to the next level of competition. (Remember: If you have judges who are evaluating preliminary rounds of competition and projects are moving on to a final round, please explain this to the judges!)

- When you meet with other judges after viewing entries and interviewing students, **RANK ENTRIES FIRST**. The contest coordinator will need your results immediately. You can fill out the comment sheets afterward.

- You will take **rule infractions** into account when you rank entries. In the case of minor infractions like using an inconsistent citation format or going just a few words over the limit, judges may choose to note the infraction on the evaluation forms and not reduce the entries ranking. However, if an infraction gives the entry an **unfair advantage** over others (an extra minute in a documentary, for example) then judges should reduce the project's rank.

- **PLAGIARISM** and **REUSE OF AN ENTRY FROM A PAST YEAR** are unacceptable and will result in disqualification of the entry. If you suspect either of these things, inform your contest coordinator and let the coordinator handle the situation.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN A "GOOD" PROJECT?
   Ask judges to take out a comment sheet and review criteria with you.

- **Historical Quality:** Don't forget the history in History Day. The majority of your evaluation will be based on the historical quality of the entry, not glitz. Research and analysis accounts for **60%** of the evaluation.
  - ➢ Research: As historians, students should utilize a range of primary sources and secondary sources (within reasonable reach of a middle or high school student). They should recognize different points of view and be aware of bias in the sources they use.
  - ➢ Analysis: Students should examine the meaning and impact of the topic, not just describe it. They should express their own informed opinion (or thesis) and support it with evidence.

- **Clarity of Presentation:** Good presentation doesn't just include decoration and "flashiness." It's also a result of proper grammar, correct spelling, and effective organization. Often, simpler is better!

- **Connection to Theme:** This year's theme is, "_____." Allow students to make their own argument as to why their topic connects to the theme and is significant in history. If a topic does not relate to the theme AT ALL, judges should take that into consideration when ranking entries.

3. WRITING COMMENTS

- Comment sheets are the **single** most important thing that students will receive from their participation!

  - ➢ Students who do not make it to the next level of competition will only receive comment sheets. They will want to understand why they didn't go on and what they can do to improve in the future.

  - ➢ For students who are ranked as finalists, constructive criticism will help them prepare for the next level of competition.

- Effective comments are **positive**, **constructive**, and **consistent**.

  - ➢ **Positive –** Begin by complimenting the student on a strength, and phrase suggestions for improvements in a positive way. ("In the future, you could consider ways to organize your information more clearly, such as… etc.")

  - ➢ **Constructive –** Criticism is at least as important as compliments are. Students who don't go on will need to understand why they didn't, and students who do go on need to know what they can do better. Remember, students WANT constructive criticism!

➢ **Consistent –** When a student looks over his or her evaluations, the checkmarks on each sheet should be relatively consistent. There is nothing more confusing for a student than to receive contrary comments from different judges. Each sheet does not have to mirror the next exactly, but if you noticed something about a project that was especially well done or is particularly in need of improvement, discuss it with the other panelists and make sure they grade it the same way. Also, make sure all judges note rule infractions.

5. CLOSING NOTES

- Don't tell students who the winners are and spoil the excitement! Please don't write on comment sheets "Congratulations on going on to the _____ event."

- Explain how you will announce the regional finalists. If you have a ceremony, invite judges to attend.

- Review logistics. *(Where to go to discuss when interviews are finished, where to turn in comment sheets and other materials, where refreshments will be served, etc.).*

- If you have a question or a problem, you can find me at…

- Any questions?

- Thanks again!