What is an exhibit?

An exhibit is a visual representation of your research and interpretation of your topic's significance in history. Your exhibit will look a lot like a small version of an exhibit you might see in a museum. You may have already made something similar to an exhibit if you have ever created a poster for a class project.

Creating an exhibit gives you the opportunity to use a variety of visual materials to make your argument. In addition to text, you can use things like timelines, maps, graphs, charts, photographs, paintings, media devices, or artifacts. You can also incorporate primary sources into your exhibit — including quotations, letters, newspaper articles, and more. Using these visual elements will help you create a rich and informative exhibit.

The Basic Framework

- **Size Limit**: the overall size of your exhibit when displayed can be up to 40 inches wide, 30 inches deep and 6 feet high.
- **Word Limit**: There is a 500 word limit to all text that you create that appears on or as part of your exhibit. All the text that you write counts toward the 500 word limit. If you didn't write it, it doesn't count towards the limit. This means that you can use quotations from other sources and it won't count towards your limit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of things that count...</th>
<th>Examples of things that don't count...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Titles and subtitles</td>
<td>• Quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Captions</td>
<td>• Graphs, charts, or timelines that you don't create yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Graphs, charts, or timelines that you create yourself</td>
<td>• Brief citations crediting the source of an illustration or quotations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Text that you write that is on your exhibit, is included in a scrapbook, or narration in a media device</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dates count as one word. For example, &quot;December 2, 1935&quot; would all count as one word.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Media**: Media devices (such as tape recorders, projectors, computers, tablets, or video monitors) can be used in your exhibit. They must not run for more than a total of 3 minutes and the viewer must be able to control the media device. Remember, media devices must fit inside the size limit, and if you write narration for your media clip it will count towards your 500 word-limit.
- **Be sure to check the NHD Contest Rulebook for complete category rules!**

Why Should I Choose the Exhibit Category?

The exhibit category is great for people who enjoy working with their hands and physically building an argument. If you’ve ever gone to a museum and wondered how they put an exhibit together and thought you might want to give it a try—now is your chance. You should make sure that you have access to exhibit building supplies, including exhibit or poster board, construction paper, a printer, scissors, adhesives, etc. While many topics can be effectively conveyed using the exhibit category, this category is especially suitable for topics that have a variety of visual materials that can be used to support the argument, including photographs, illustrations, maps, graphs, newspaper articles, letters, etc.
Exhibits are designed to display visual and written information on a topic in an easy-to-understand and attractive manner. Exhibits are not simply collections of material. They are carefully designed to make an argument about your topic. To be successful, an exhibit must create an effective balance between visual interest and historical explanation.

Three-Dimensional Exhibit
A three-dimensional exhibit is more complicated to construct, but can be especially effective for explaining topics where change over time is important. Like the three-panel display, one side should contain your title and main theme. As you move around the exhibit, the development of your topic can be explored. It is not necessary for the project itself to be able to spin. You may set it on a table (or the floor) so people can walk around it.

When making a three-dimensional exhibit, good organization is especially important. Because your exhibit has so many sides, viewers may be more easily confused about how to follow your exhibit’s narrative. Make sure that each side is clearly labeled, cleanly organized, and that there is a logical flow of ideas as the viewer moves about your exhibit.

Three-Panel Display
The most common form of an exhibit is a three-panel display, similar to the one on the left. This style is the least complicated to design and build, and is a very effective way to present your information. Here are some tips for this style:

- Be sure your title is the main focus of the center panel.
- Use the center panel to present your main ideas and argument.
- Use the side panels to provide supporting evidence for your argument.
- Divide the exhibit into sections to give it an organizational structure that makes sense to the viewer.
- If your topic is presented chronologically, make sure the sequence works visually on the panels.
- You have a limited number of words; use them sparingly and let the quotations, documents, artifacts, drawings, and photographs demonstrate your thesis.
- Artifacts or other materials may also be placed on the table between the side panels, but remember that it should be directly related to the topic and necessary to support your argument.

Exhibit Shapes and Sizes

This is just a start to the creative ways that History Day students have expressed their arguments in the exhibit category. Think about ways to connect the content of your project with the look of your exhibit. The only limit is your imagination and ability to transport your project to a competition!
A Closer Look at History Day Exhibits

A good design doesn’t just jazz up your exhibit; it helps express your ideas. Can you guess what this exhibit is about without even reading the text? The cut-out of Rosie the Riveter lets the viewer immediately know the project’s topic. The student took the theme a step further by using a red, white, and blue color scheme to convey the patriotic aspects of her topic.

The theme for the year this project was created was “Revolution, Reaction, Reform.” To show the topic’s connection to the theme, the student used words from the theme in the title and section headings.

A Closer Look at History Day Exhibits

The thesis and main argument are very clear to the viewer in this project. The student used a larger font and a bold border to immediately attract your attention.

Photographs, newspapers, and sheet music are just a few of the primary sources that the student was able to incorporate into the project to prove her argument.

History Day exhibits come in all shapes and sizes, but there are several common characteristics you can see in many good exhibits. Check out these exhibits from other Wisconsin students!

This project was about the journey that immigrants took through Ellis Island to their new lives in America. To connect the project to the topic, the students used an old suitcase as the frame for their exhibit. They made sure their argument stood out and divided up the space to give the exhibit an organizational structure in the same way they would have if they had used an exhibit board.

History Day isn’t about glitz. The student has a simple, effective design for a project with a clear argument and solid research.

This exhibit incorporates a variety of interesting artifacts for the viewer to examine.
Planning

Getting Started
After you finish your research, make an outline for your exhibit, just as you would before you write a paper. Include the main arguments and points that you would like to make in the exhibit. Using this outline, you'll be able to see what the main sections of your exhibit need to be in order to support your argument and convey it to the viewer.

Plan It Out
Plan out your exhibit with a simple sketch before you start to create the full-scale project.

Connect Content to Design
Let the topic of your project inspire the design of your exhibit. What visual look can you give your exhibit that will connect the appearance of your project to your topic? This can be as simple as using appropriate colors. A project about women's suffrage, for example, would be striking using purple and gold, colors commonly associated with the movement. In the past, students have been able to connect the look of their project with the content on even larger scales. Students have created projects about conservation that look like trees, projects about education reform that look like school houses and exhibits about wars that have included dioramas of battle scenes.

Divide and Conquer
Split your outline into different parts. Organizing your exhibit into logical sections will make it easier for you to assemble and easier for your viewer to understand what you are trying to say. What sections might you need in your exhibit? Background? Significance? Historical Context? Outcomes? Relation to Theme?

What's Your Point?
No matter what type of exhibit you decide to create, what topic you choose, or what division you are in, it is important to make sure that your argument (thesis) is clear in the project itself. Your argument should be the first thing the viewer looks at so they know right away what you will be proving in your exhibit. It should be concise and well-written. Usually students do this by making sure the argument is located where the viewers’ eyes will look first, usually in the center in a larger font.

Putting It All Together

Avoid Clutter
It is always tempting to try to get as much on your exhibit panels as possible, but this usually makes for a cluttered and confusing display. You don't have to put every single photo, drawing, and map that you found onto your exhibit. Try to select only the most important items for your project boards. Clarity and organization are most important goals for this project. Everything should have a reason for being on your exhibit.

Content is More Important Than Glitz
Fancy exhibits are nice to look at and can be a lot of fun to create—but remember that your historical argument is the most important part of your exhibit.
A Note on the Quote
Quotations can be an effective way of using historical evidence to support your argument. Sometimes, a quote from the historical figure just says it better than you could say it yourself.

Only original words (i.e. words written by you) count toward the word limit, so quotations do not take away from your 500 words. Quotations should not, however, be used just to “get around” the word limit. Using quotations this way and covering your exhibit with tons of quotes can easily make your exhibit cluttered and overwhelming for the viewer. The important aspects of your NHD project, your argument, analysis and interpretation, should stand out. It is important, therefore, to make sure that there is a reason for everything you put up on your exhibit and that it is well organized.

Labels
Once you’ve divided up your information into sections, you should make sure to label those sections. The labels you use for your title and main ideas are important because they direct the viewer’s eye around your project. Remember: **Big Idea=Big Font.** You will want to put your title in the largest font on your exhibit and then scale the rest of your fonts down according to their importance.

One way to make your labels stand out is to have the writing on a light colored piece of paper with a darker background or matting behind it. This can be done with construction paper, tag board, or mat board. Dark black lettering makes your labels easier to read. Photographs and written materials will also stand out more on backgrounds.

Captions & Credits
Captions can be very useful in showing how a particular illustration or item you’ve included in your exhibit helps prove your point. Which of the following captions do you think would work best with the political cartoon on the right about former Wisconsin Governor Robert La Follette?

Why?
A. Political Cartoon about Governor La Follette
B. Governor La Follette’s supporters championed his reforms as beneficial for citizens of the state.

**Credits are required for all images and quoted material. See the NHD Rulebook for details.**

Keep it Neat
You’ve spent a lot of energy researching and creating your exhibit. Take the time to give it some extra polish. Make sure you’ve checked your spelling and grammar. Make sure you’ve cut and glued things to your exhibit board as neatly as possible.

Look It Over

**The Exhibit Stands Alone**
When evaluating NHD exhibits, judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in your exhibit itself. *The exhibit has to stand on its own.* Have someone who has never seen your exhibit look at it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc). Without saying anything, let them read through the entire exhibit. Then, ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my exhibit? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my exhibit? What is confusing to you?
Orientation

Make sure the title and subtitle of the exhibit are prominent features of the design.
Make the main idea or thesis clear to the viewer.

Segmentation

Organize the exhibit into subtopics.
Use design elements to make subtopics clear to viewer.

Explanation

Use clear and concise captions and text to:
1. Identify pictures, objects, or documents.
2. Interpret Information for the viewer.
# History Day Exhibit Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thesis:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection to Theme:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and Color Ideas:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main ideas that support my thesis:</td>
<td>Main sections to organize my exhibit:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•</td>
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<td>•</td>
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<tr>
<td>•</td>
<td>•</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible illustrations to use:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exhibit Organization

Title

BACKGROUND
Place your topic in Historical Context
What information do we need to know that is going to help understand your topic?
What outside circumstances are going to influence your topic that we need to know about?

BUILD-UP
Who are the main players and what are they doing to prepare for the main events of your topic?
Give more specific information related to your topic than "background" section.
What are the events leading up to the main event?
What is life like before the main events of your topic?

THESES

MAIN EVENT
Major details about the main events in your topic

SHORT TERM IMPACT
What are some of the immediate reactions to the main event shortly after it happened?
What changed? New laws? New way of thinking?
Who was affected by the event?
How is the world different after the main events of your topic? Examples?

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
Why is this topic important in history?
What is the long term significance?
What were the intended/unintended consequences?
So what?
What do you want the reader to take away from your project?
6.4. Exhibit

An exhibit is a three-dimensional physical and visual representation of your historical argument, research, and interpretation of your topic’s significance in history.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXHIBIT ELEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ Your analysis must be clear and evident to the viewer in the exhibit itself. Do not rely on supplemental material or media devices to deliver your message as judges may not have time to view them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Your argument must be supported with, but not overwhelmed by, visual and textual evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Your exhibit must conform to all general and category rules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Your exhibit must not include takeaway items for judges or others.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SIZE REQUIREMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▶ The overall size of your exhibit when displayed for judging must be no larger than 40 inches wide, 30 inches deep, and 72 inches high.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Circular or rotating exhibits or those meant to be viewed from all sides must be no more than 30 inches in diameter or diagonal. See Figure 6 (p. 32) for illustration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Measurement of the exhibit does not include the table on which it rests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▶ Measurement does include any base that you create, any table drapes that you provide, and supplemental materials placed on the table.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### WORD LIMIT
- A 500-word limit applies to all words that you write. Each word or number counts as one word. See Figure 3 (p. 21) for instructions about counting words.
- The following words **DO** count:
  - Text that you write, including titles, subtitles, captions, graphs, timelines, media devices, or supplemental materials (e.g., photo albums, scrapbooks)
- Words in the following **DO NOT** count:
  - Primary or secondary materials or quotes included on your exhibit or in media or supplemental materials
  - Source credits

### NOTES:
1. Rely on your own analysis, primary sources, and visuals to tell your story. Use caution when deciding on the length and quantity of quotes, primary or secondary. See Student Voice (Section 4.4, p. 12).
2. Extensive supplemental material is inappropriate. Oral history transcripts, correspondence between you and interview subjects, questionnaires, and other primary or secondary material used as sources for your exhibit should be cited in your bibliography, but not attached to your bibliography or exhibit.

### MEDIA DEVICES
- If used, media devices or electronics in an exhibit must not run for more than a total of two minutes and must not loop continuously.
- Any media devices must not include dramatic or narrative student involvement.
- Judges must be able to control media devices by using clearly visible and accessible on/off and volume controls.
- Media devices must fit within the size and word limits of the exhibit.
- Anything that links externally, such as QR codes, is prohibited.

### CREDITING SOURCES
- All quotes and visual sources (e.g., photographs, paintings, charts, graphs) must be credited on the exhibit and cited in the annotated bibliography.
- Source credits do not count toward the word total.
- See [nhd.org/annotated-bibliography](http://nhd.org/annotated-bibliography) for more information and an example of a source credit.

### REQUIRED WRITTEN MATERIALS
- Provide your required written materials for judging.
- Bring additional copies to contests, as they may be needed.
- Refer to your Contest Coordinator for submission instructions.
FIGURE 6. EXHIBIT SIZE LIMIT ILLUSTRATION

Drawings are not to scale and do not illustrate all possible exhibit shapes.

Top View of Circular or Rotating Exhibits or Those Meant to be Viewed from All Sides

Front View of Stationary Exhibit with Maximum Dimensions