

HANDOUT: ORGANIZING INFORMATION FOR HISTORY DAY

Beginning the writing process can be difficult. It is hard to know what information to include and how to arrange it in your project. As a writer you will be acting as both a “scholar” and a “chef” to complete your project. As a scholar, you will have to decide on the most important information to include. As a chef, you will share your information in the most effective way for your category and topic.

Top Tips on Writing for All History Day Categories

- **Break it down.** Instead of trying to write everything in one night, create an outline or guide that lets you write in smaller pieces. Using this as a guide for your project will also help viewers and judges more easily understand your project. Also, if you have divided up the writing responsibilities, make sure your writing style flows smoothly in the end.
- **Use your thesis to guide you.** Everything included in your project should lead back to supporting your thesis. If you are having trouble narrowing down the information you want to fit into your project, look back at your thesis. It can help you to figure out what is “interesting” versus “important.”
- **Seek advice.** Remember you want your project to be easily understood by anyone. Ask your friends or family members to take a look at the project. If they have that “huh?” look on their face, you may want to consider revising your work. Your argument and evidence should be clear and easy to understand to someone not familiar with your topic.
- **Keep it short and to the point.** If you are working in the exhibit or website categories, you don’t have a lot of words to convey your information. Make sure to keep your writing short and to the point. No one goes to a museum to read a book.
- **Once is not enough.** It is crucial to have at least one re-write of your information. Writing is a process. Your first draft will likely need to be revised at least once – and maybe more!
- **Use an active voice.** Things rarely just “happen” in history, someone or something is usually propelling it. Instead of saying “the Berlin Wall came down in 1989,” try, “the Berlin Wall was taken down in 1989.”
- **Viewers can’t read your mind.** You have been working on this topic for months, for some of the viewers and judges this may be the first time they encounter it. Don’t assume they know anything about what you are presenting.

Strategies for the Writing Process

- **Start by identifying the most important quotes, excerpts, images, etc.** Write these on notecards that you can arrange on a table.
- **Write it out on paper first.** Writing key points on notecards and then moving them around into different configurations can help you segment your work. This can also be a good way to save drafts you may want to come back to later, rather than having just erased them on the computer.
- **The best place to start is to start.** Don’t let your time go to waste because you are afraid of “getting something wrong” or not writing it perfectly the first time. Once you write something on paper it is much easier for others to advise you and help you work on your writing.