

How To—RESEARCH YOUR HISTORY FAIR PROJECT

Introduction—Remember that your history fair project is above all else a research project. More than any other factor or even combinations of factors, it is the quality of research that determines the quality of your project. This is not your typical, pull-out-the-ole-encyclopedia or jump-on-the-internet type project. You are expected to do HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH.

NHD's Research Roadmap:

- (1) On Sundosite: "Class Project Materials" page under "BHS History Day" dropdown menu
- (2) Read & take it to heart

What is HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH?

- Variety of Sources
 - mix of secondary and primary sources
 - as many different media as possible
 - different perspectives—need balance
- Quantity of Sources—you want to dig up and exhaust as many resources as you can.
- Quality of Sources—you want the best sources
 - Go to primary sources whenever possible
 - Use secondary sources intended for professional audiences prepared by well-respected experts

How do I Know Quality Sources?

- PROPP:
 - Primaries or Secondary
 - Reason to Lie
 - Other sources
 - Public or Private
 - Past Reliability
- Professional Sources
 - Ask yourself, "Who is the intended reader?" If the answer is a professional historian, you're on the right track
 - Professional scholarly journals
 - Books that have footnotes
 - Books printed by universities
- Find the Experts—Piggy back on the research of others. As you do research, some names and sources will keep coming up. Go to those sources.
 - Interviews
 - Start working early to set up interviews w/ experts and/or witnesses
 - Contact many as you will get many dead ends
 - Always be polite
 - Be prepared for your interviews
 - Ask interviewee in advance about recording/videotaping
 - If recording, think about audio quality and framing your shots

GENERAL RESEARCH TIPS

- Start broad and work to narrow.
 - Use general secondary resources first
 - As you become more familiar with your topic, seek out the more dense and specific sources.
 - Eventually, you should consult any relevant primary source.
- Have specific questions you are trying to answer.
 - Never just go to the library “to do some research” or “learn about your topic.”
 - Go with a plan and a specific goal.
 - It is much easier to find what you are looking for if you know what you are looking for.
- Be Patient & Perseverant.
 - Research is often slow.
 - You have to keep plugging along and working towards the big break.
 - Expect some dead ends.
- Skim & Scan.
 - Do not try to read entire books or articles unless absolutely necessary.
 - Skim & scan to find the part you really need.
 - Look over the table of contents of books.
 - Read introductions & conclusions.
 - Use indexes.
 - In a chapter, read only the first line of each paragraph to help you zoom in on what you really want.
 - When you find the passages that are really what you’re looking for, then read closely
- Use Library Staff
 - People don’t work in libraries so that they can shush people.
 - They are professionals at helping people find information.
 - When you know what you are looking for but you are not sure how to find it yourself, ask.
- Put Forth a Consistent Effort.
 - **Do research every day.**
 - To make progress and stay in the proper mindset, you must work on this consistently.
 - If you are waiting for a particular source to be transferred from another library, work on some other aspect of your research.
 - Don’t waste time.