

Chicago Metro History Fair Websites

What is a History Fair Website?

A History Fair website is a computer-based representation of your research and argument that incorporates both textual and non-textual content (e.g. images, songs, interviews, videos, images, and interactive features) to engage and inform your viewer about your topic. Think of it as an online, in-depth, multimedia, interactive exhibit.

The History Fair Website is not like the websites that you typically use when you are doing your research or seeking information or shopping. It has an argument with evidence—just like any other project—but a website communicates to the audience in a different way. While many topics can be effectively conveyed using this category, it is especially suitable for topics that have a variety of non-textual materials that can be used to support your argument and provide an interactive experience for the viewer.



Why Would I Choose the Website Category?

The website category is great for students who enjoy working on computers and using software tools. If you've ever wanted to learn how to build a website, now is your chance. You will need substantial time on a computer with Internet access in order to build a History Fair Website—make sure it is available to you. Websites are also free to create, provided you have access to digital equipment.

Explore sample student websites that are available on both the History Fair (www.chicagohistoryfair.org) or National History Day (www.nhd.org) websites to see if this category is right for you.

Key Rules and How to Get Your History Fair Website

The website may only be produced on the **NHD Website Editor**, available online for free to History Fair students at www.nhd.org (or via the History Fair link). Do not attempt to create your site elsewhere and transfer it into NHD's system: **Only websites built on the NHD platform will be able to enter the History Fair.** The editing system will give you a URL that looks something like <http://12345678.nhd.weebly.com> — if the URL you are given does not begin with **numbers**, stop immediately and contact your teacher or the History Fair office. Make sure that you give your URL, username, password, and email address to your teacher—they will need it to register your project.

Other key rules:

- **Word Limit:** The website may contain no more than **1,200 student-composed** words.
- **Audio and Video Clips:** The site may contain no more than **four minutes of media**, in total.
- **No External Links:** You may not link to outside websites, except to download software plug-ins.
- **Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography:** You must post your Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography on your website under a tab called "References." Use PDF file uploads — NOT Google Drive.
- **PUBLISH!** Your judges will see only what you publish, so be sure to save and publish your site *each time* you make changes.



Read the detailed rules on the next page before you start on your website—and refer to them often. Then check out the pages on planning and organizing your website and on using interactivity and non-textual material.

History Fair Website Rules

The website category is the most interactive History Fair category. Using the NHD Website Editor platform, students build a series of interconnected web pages that convey a historical argument supported by multimedia evidence. Students need consistent access to a computer with an Internet connection to complete a History Fair website.

- Websites are created by individuals or groups of no more than five students.
- All entries must be constructed in the [NHD Website Editor](#) or they will NOT be eligible to participate in History Fair. The URL must begin with eight numbers (e.g. <http://12345678.nhd.weebly.com>).
- Website entries may contain no more than 1,200 student-composed words. Students must state the number of student-composed words on the home page. The following do not count toward the word limit: quotations; brief credits identifying the source of visuals or quotations; recurring menus, titles, and navigation instructions; required word count notification; words within primary documents and artifacts; and the Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography, which must be integrated into the site. All other text written by students, including explanatory or analytical captions, do count.
- Students may use pre-existing photos, videos, music, etc., within the site with proper credit (such as, "Photo from Addie Wyatt Papers, Harsh Collection, Chicago Public Library"). Using objects or content created by others for specific use in your entry violates this rule. For example, using a graphic that others produced at your request is not permitted.
- Students must operate all equipment (computers, cameras, etc.) and software (NHD Website Editor, photo or video editing software, etc.) used in the development of the website. Students may receive help and advice from others on the mechanical aspects of creating an entry, but the work must be the students' own.
- The first page of the site must serve as the "home page." It must include the student name(s), entry title, division, number of student-composed words, and the main menu. Including the thesis or a short introduction on the home page is strongly recommended, but not required.
- The website may contain multimedia clips (audio, visual, or both) that total no more than four minutes (i.e. use one 4-minute clip, four 1-minute clips, etc.). Music is included in the total. Students may record quotations and primary source materials for dramatic effect, but may not narrate their own competitions or explanatory material. If students use any media that requires a specific software to view (e.g. Flash, QuickTime, RealPlayer), they must provide a link to an Internet site where the software is available as a free, secure, and legal download. The entire site, including all media, must be no more than 100 MB.
- Entries may not link to live or external sites, except to direct viewers to software plug-ins.
- The content and appearance of a page cannot change when the page is refreshed in the browser. Random text or image generators are not allowed. Pages must be interconnected with hyperlinks. Automatic redirects are not permitted.
- Crediting sources: All quotations from written sources, visuals, and closely paraphrased accounts must be credited within the website. Brief source credits (for example, "Jane Addams, 1908") do not count toward the word limit. All sources must be properly cited in the Annotated Bibliography.
- The navigational menu (organization of the website) must include a "References" tab that holds the Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography. Materials should be posted as PDF files—do not use Google Drive.
- The pages comprising the site must be viewable in a standard web browser (e.g. Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome). Students are responsible for ensuring that the entry is viewable in multiple browsers.
- Students may not edit their site during judging—the site will be locked. Advancing projects are given another opportunity for revision.

Rules for All Categories

- Exhibits, documentaries, websites, and performances may be completed individually or by a group of 2-5 students. Papers are individual only. All students in a group must be involved in the research and creation of the project.
- Topics must connect with Chicago or Illinois history in order to advance to the state contest. Non-Illinois topics are permitted at the regional and finals competitions. Teachers often require integration of the National History Day theme, but the theme is not required by the Chicago Metro History Fair. Projects registered as “NHD eligible” will be assessed on how well their project integrates the NHD theme.
- Students may research, create, and enter only one project each year. Sharing research in multiple projects is not permitted. Revising or reusing an entry from a previous year may result in disqualification. Entries submitted for competition must be original and have been researched and developed in the current contest year.
- Students are responsible for the research, design, and creation of their own project, as well as operating their own equipment and materials. Students may receive advice from adults on the mechanical aspects of creating an entry and/or reasonable help necessary for safety, but the work must be completed by students. Feedback on the student’s work is permissible (help proofreading; suggestions or questions based on the student’s ideas, etc.). Materials created by others specifically for use in the entry violate this rule.
- Each project is required to have a Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography.
- Word counts must be provided for exhibits, websites, and papers. Time lengths must be provided for documentaries and performances. *[See individual category rules for more specifics.]*
- Exhibits, performances, and documentaries will be judged and interviewed at the public competitions. Papers and websites are judged in a separate stream, which may have different deadlines for submission. Paper and website entrants will have an opportunity to share their projects at the competitions.
- Students should not prepare a formal, verbal presentation; however, they should plan to respond to questions posed by judges. The interviews are important to the History Fair experience, but the entry is judged on its merits alone.
- Plagiarism is unacceptable, and constitutes grounds for disqualification. *[See www.plagiarism.org]*
- Items potentially dangerous in any way—such as weapons, firearms, animals, etc.—are strictly prohibited.
- The Fair Use Doctrine allows students to use pre-existing materials (photos, footage, music, etc.) for educational purposes, including student productions like History Fair; therefore, students need not seek formal permissions within the context of the competition. However, if the project is shown in non-educational settings, then permissions should be sought as appropriate.
- Teachers may have additional rules/restrictions for the History Fair at individual schools. Students should comply with all rules set by their teacher.

Required Materials

All projects must include an **Annotated Bibliography** and **Summary Statement**. In the bibliography, each source should be *annotated* with a short description of how the student used that source. The bibliography must be divided between *primary* sources (sources from the time period or written by someone with firsthand knowledge) and *secondary* sources (sources written after the time period, typically by a historian). Bibliographies must follow either the *Turabian* or *MLA* style format. Include all sources that contributed useful information, perspectives, or visuals, but not necessarily every source consulted. Annotations may describe why students placed the source as primary/secondary if it is not immediately obvious; and, in the case of web sources, may also describe who sponsors the site. Bundle photos or other materials from the same collection into a single citation. Cite oral history transcripts, questionnaires, or other supplementary materials in the bibliography—do not provide copies of them. Students must acknowledge all sources used in the development of the entry in the Annotated Bibliography in order to avoid plagiarism.

The [Summary Statement](#) provides the project’s thesis, a summary of the argument, and information about the development of the project. The form is available on the History Fair website. Except for websites, the Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography should be printed on plain, white paper and stapled together. The Annotated Bibliography and Summary Statement are not included in the word count.

Websites Need Interactive Elements

A History Fair website is not an electronic paper or an exhibit viewed in an Internet browser. Your site should actively teach viewers about your topic. How do you catch their attention and curiosity so they want to learn more? How do you get them involved in your topic? Interactive elements done well help accomplish your goals.

What Are Interactive Elements?

There are many different interactive elements that you can include in your website to engage your viewer in learning about your topic, such as image maps, pop-up windows, sound, videos, timelines, or databases.

Not All Interactive Elements Are Created Equal

Make sure your interactivity helps the viewer build a better understanding of the ideas that you're presenting. For example, if your topic examines a particular Civil War soldier, an interactive map that follows the path of the soldier's regiment would help the viewer understand where the events you're describing took place. On the other hand, a quiz that simply reviews factual information found elsewhere in the site would not interpret your topic because it would not provide the audience with deeper understanding. Most games will probably not help you demonstrate your topic's analysis or significance.

Interactive Elements Don't Have To Be High-Tech

You don't have to be a professional web designer to incorporate interactive elements into your website. Look at other history websites to see how they engage their viewers.

- Think about the example above. You could design an image map that would allow the viewer to click on battle locations. Maybe you could include a pop-up window that shows a historic photo from the battle? Or a pop-up window with a letter that soldier wrote while at that battle?
- Or, let's say you're creating a website about the Black Hawk War in which you include portions of the 1804 treaty between the government and two representatives of the Sauk nation which set the stage for the conflict that occurred 25 years later. Links on key words in the document could take viewers to a more detailed explanation of the word or idea.

Interpretive Text and Non-Textual Content

Your Words Matter: Interpret Your Sources—Don't Just Display Them

Each page of your History Fair website should offer historical interpretation that forwards one specific idea related to your thesis. You should provide analytical text on each web page that presents your argument for that section and support it with evidence. Student-composed words should synthesize and introduce multiple pieces of historical evidence presented on that page. A typical page within your website might include 50-100 words that you write, supported by 2-4 pieces of historical evidence drawn from primary and secondary sources (e.g. quotations, media, visuals). The home page (with introduction and thesis) and conclusion might be a little longer. While the majority of your words will probably be the interpretive passages discussed above, you may also need shorter captions that explain a specific source and source credits showing where you got your evidence. Your text will help your viewer understand the purpose of the illustrations, clips, and documents you included in the site.

What Is Non-Textual Content?

Interactive elements, media, and other non-textual context woven with text make the website category unique. Your website might include a variety of historical evidence that supports your ideas and makes your site more interesting and informative: documents, artifacts, oral history selections, quotations, photographs, paintings, video clips, songs, newspaper articles, or a recording from an interview.

Incorporating Non-Textual Content into Your Website

Select non-textual content that supports the text you have written and helps the viewer better understand your argument. Consider including thumbnail images that link to larger resolution, easily legible versions. Include video clips with participants in historical events or experts on your topic. You will edit photos, songs, videos, and other media *outside* of the NHD Website Editor, then upload them. If you do not have your own editing software, there are plenty of free, legal sources available on the Internet.

The History Fair discourages the use of a "photo gallery" page. Sources should be integrated with the text that analyzes and explains this material.

Before Building the Website: Make Plans

Professional web designers think about building a website like building a house. First, the architect decides the important features of the house (such as how many bedrooms the house will have and how many square feet it will be). Next, they draw the house on paper, plotting out the kitchen, bathroom, and living room and make sure these elements are arranged in a way that will be comfortable for the family living there. Only after plans are finished and double checked does anyone pick up a hammer to begin construction. Prior planning and building your website in the right order will save you a lot of time, energy, and frustration.

Your History Fair Website and How to Organize It

After completing your research, your next step is to begin planning your website. Make sure that you have enough and the right kind of sources to include in your website. You will have to decide:

- How you want to divide your information into different web pages.
- How you want to organize those pages within your site.
- What navigation structure supports your argument.

These are important decisions that need to be made before you start your website. As the web designer, it's your job to decide what you want your audience to learn from your website and to brainstorm ways that you can teach them. The way you organize and present your information gives physical form to your argument. You have a lot of choices as to how you can divide your research and argument into different pages on your site. You may use one of the templates provided by the NHD Website Editor or you also have the option of customizing the template and layout through the Editor. Don't be intimidated—the Help documents within this program offer plenty of guidance! Creating your own template for a website doesn't mean that you have to reinvent web formats. Look at other history websites to see what formatting they have used to communicate their information. (You can always look at their code to see how they built their site. Just be sure to credit use of the code.)

Dividing Your Information into Web Pages

To get started, think about your information as if you were writing an outline for a paper. How would you divide up your material into major sections? How does each section support your argument? Using note cards or pieces of paper, write down the major ideas you have about your topic. You can lay out these cards and rearrange them to understand how the ideas fit together.

- What categories do they fall into?
- What logical order should they be arranged in?
- How do these ideas relate to the thesis?

Once you feel comfortable with these categories, they will become the pages of your website. Craft short page titles that express what these pages will contribute to your site. Limiting the number of major sections in your site will help keep your navigational menu cleaner by avoiding use of the "More..." tab. You can have as many subpages as you need, but try to keep the navigational tabs across the top of your screen to less than six.

Website Organization

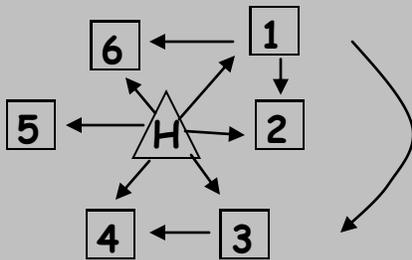
Since you're not just building different *web pages* but building a *website*, you have to give your site an overall organization that is logical and easy to navigate. There are many ways to do this and planning your site on paper first will give you a chance to play with these organizational structures before you put time and energy into construction. At this stage of planning, diagram the organization your site will use. Time, perspective, or topic are just a few of the general categories into which you can sort information. Different categories will help you to make different arguments through your website. For example, a website about the Black Hawk War could be organized chronologically, or sorted by battle or by groups of people involved in the conflict. How would each of these organizational formats help or hinder a viewer's understanding of the topic?

Before Building the Website: Organize

Here are a few examples of web organization that you might want to try. It is much easier to try different formats on paper than changing your direction while in the midst of building your website! Experiment before you commit to a particular organization! Review the samples online to see actual samples of the styles.



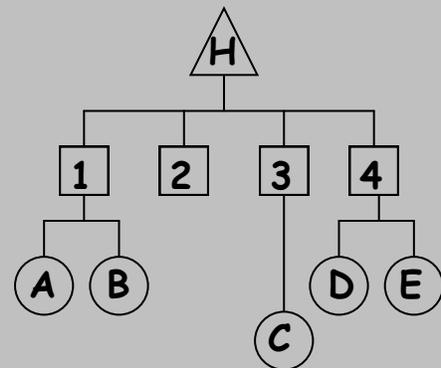
Linear organization assumes that a viewer is going to go from one page to the next in a very specific order.



Spider web organization lets the viewer explore the website in a variety of ways. Since the pages are one level deep, it assumes that information is equally important. Note: Not all pages have to link together.

Hierarchical organization

lets the viewer explore the website in a variety of ways. Since there are multiple levels of pages, you can organize the more important information to be closer to the home page and the supporting information to be deeper in the site.



Tip: For many topics, the multiple layers of hierarchical organization allows you to deepen your historical analysis.

The Home Page: Your Website's "Welcome Mat"

The first page of the website must serve as the "home page." To create this page, keep in mind the following:

- Your home page must include the names of the participants, entry title, division, student-composed word count, and a main website menu that directs viewers to various sections of the site.
- The home page is also a great place to provide your introduction and thesis. Let your viewer know right away the argument you will be making.

The Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography

Your Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography should be included as an integral part of the website (but will not count towards the word limit). You will need a tab on the home page for these materials. History Fair recommends that you title this tab "References," and save PDF versions of these files on the References page. Do not use Google Drive or Scribd, as judges usually have trouble accessing files stored on an external site.

Before Building the Website: Design & Draft

Create Blueprints of Your Website Before You Build

Your design should connect to your topic. Consider what colors, fonts, and general style you will use on the site and make a list of what you decide so as you build the website, you will know what you chose to use where.

- **Your Color Scheme:** Select colors for your background, text, and fit the topic and mood of the website.
- **Use a Common Font:** Use a “browser safe” font like Times New Roman or Arial for your body text. This ensures that your font will be the same for each viewer. Fancy fonts can be great for highlights and titles, but they can be difficult to read and often won’t work on your viewer’s computer. If you download a cool font to use in your website, keep in mind that your viewers’ computers will translate it into another font unless the text is saved within a .jpg or .gif image that you create. Keep a style sheet handy for what you decided to use for heads, sub-heads, body text, captions, etc.
- **Use the Same Basic Layout on Every Page:** Your site will be easier for viewers to use if each page has navigation buttons and content in about the same places. It’s always helpful to have a header with the site’s title on each page.
- **Strive for Clarity:** You want your viewers to understand the content of your website, and not struggle to read it. Remember that background images can make text difficult to read and long paragraphs or blocks of text can be difficult to read on computer screens.

Draft Your Text and Non-Textual Content

- **Page Content:** What are the headings for each of the pages? What information should go on each page? Drafting your text in a word processing program will be much easier (and safer) than writing it directly in the web design program. Type your text into a program that doesn’t add extra formatting (such as Notepad) or strip the formatting that is in Word BEFORE you cut and paste the text into the NHD Website Editor in order to avoid technical difficulties with fonts. *Keep track of your word count as you write your own text!*
- **Non-Textual Content and Interactive Elements:** As you draft your site on paper, you will also have to decide what non-textual content (illustrations, media, etc.) and interactive elements you will include. What photos or multimedia are available? How will each piece help the viewer understand your argument and topic? How can you engage the viewer through interactive elements?

Look It Over and Get Another Set of Eyes

Once you have your first paper draft of the website ready, look it over to see how all the elements fit together. Have a teacher, friend, or a family member provide feedback before you begin. Does it make sense to them? Are they confused by your organization?

Begin Construction

After taking these initial steps, you’re ready to begin constructing your website. Become familiar with the NHD Website Editor and start translating your ideas into a digital form!

Website Category Rules

In the intensity of building the website, students can become wrapped up in the research, design, and production and may forget about an important rule (especially word count and media limits). Remember to refer to the website category rules before, during, and after you work on your website.

More Tips for Making a Great Website

- 1. Research Comes First!** Research is the most important part of a successful History Fair project. Don't begin playing with the software until you have a solid foundation of research and analysis. If you find in the course of research that your topic does not work well in the website medium (enough visual and interactive sources, etc.), consider switching to a different medium or consult with your teacher to figure out how the topic might be revised to become more website-friendly.
- 2. Content Is More Important Than Glitz.** The most important elements of the History Fair website are: analysis, interpretation, historical context, significance, and effective use of sources and medium. Remember, you are not making separate web pages—you're making an **online, interactive, multimedia historical argument**. A clear cohesive argument should unite everything. All pages and elements should support your argument and have a purpose. Make sure your website design is easy to read and understand. Keep decorative animation and clip art to an absolute minimum and avoid "busy" background images and other clutter. Leave some blank space in your pages so the viewer isn't overwhelmed.
- 3. Write Your Text Before Uploading.** Writing out your text first helps ensure that your most important ideas are clearly expressed and that you have matched your conclusions to multimedia evidence that supports your ideas. Avoid writing text online! You will save yourself a lot of time and headache by always using a word processing program. You can save multiple drafts (if you write directly within the NHD Website Editor, your previous work is lost when you make changes) and you can keep much better track of your word count. Just be sure to upload through plain text (no formatting) so that you don't insert unnecessary format codes from the word processing program.
- 4. Edit Your Photos, Audio, Footage Before Uploading.** You will need to edit your photos, audio, and other multimedia in external editing programs and then upload to your website. Use the recommended list of free software (check the CMHEC website). As noted earlier, *avoid making a picture gallery*.
- 5. Save Your Work Early and Often.** Save your own writing and your textual and non-textual sources in at least one additional place such as a wiki-space, Google Docs, or external or Flash drives.
- 6. Give Credit Where Credit Is Due and Make Sure Judges Know the Difference Between Your Original Words and the Quotations.** You must give credit for and make apparent which materials are not yours, such as illustrations, media, movies, applications, scripts, forms, etc. These materials should have a complete citation in the Annotated Bibliography. When using quotations, either from primary or secondary sources, it is your job to make it clear to the judges that these are not your words. Use "quotation marks!!" Including other people's work under the impression that it's yours will affect your word count, but more importantly, it is plagiarism. Also, credit the sources that appear on the site, such as "Photo from the Chicago History Museum." These brief source credits do not count against your word limit. Finally, when borrowing or using someone else's coding or scripting, you must give them credit just as you would with other materials in your Annotated Bibliography.
- 7. Test It Out.** Before you are finished with your site for judging, triple-check your site to make sure it works in a variety of browsers since the judges may not use the same one you did when you produced your website. **Check your original word count again to make sure it is not over 1,200 words.** Finally, have someone who has never seen your website look at it. Without explaining anything, let them read through the entire website. Then, ask them a few questions: What am I trying to prove? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my website? What is confusing to you? Don't wait for the last minute to get this important feedback—give yourself time to make any final revisions.
- 8. Submitting Websites to Competition.** If your website has been selected to represent your school, the website will be submitted in advance of the competition so that the judges have adequate time to assess it. *If you did not create your website through the NHD Website Editor, it will not be able to compete in the History Fair.* Once the registration deadline passes, your website will be locked and you will be unable to make further changes for that competition. You must remember to **PUBLISH IT** by the lock deadline so judges see your final work. You may be asked to present it at one of the public competitions.

How will my website be evaluated?

As you create your website, go through this list and ask yourself if you've met all the criteria for a good History Fair project. Judges will use these criteria to evaluate your project.



Historical Knowledge—35% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)

- My website is historically accurate:** All the information in my website is true to the best of my knowledge.
- My website demonstrates thorough, balanced, relevant knowledge:** I have made an effort to fully explain my topic and show different perspectives.
- I place my topic in historical context:** My topic didn't take place in isolation. I made sure to place my topic into historical context—the wider intellectual, political, social, and cultural setting.



Historical Analysis—25% Junior Division (gr. 6-8); 30% Senior Division (gr. 9-12)

- My project offers a historical interpretation/argument that is supported by evidence:** I present a thesis in my project and back it up with information drawn from my research.
- I have demonstrated historical significance and impact:** My project offers an answer to the “so what?” question. I explain why it is important to know about these events in history.
- I have shown change over time and cause and effect:** My website offers an explanation of what things changed over time and why the changes took place.



Relation to National History Day Theme – *Optional*

The National History Day theme is optional in Illinois but you cannot be considered for NHD without it. If you choose to use the theme, it should be integrated into the analysis presented in your project from the very beginning. Consider using the theme in your thesis so that it is threaded throughout your project.



Sources—20%

- My project uses a depth and range of available primary sources:** I consulted a wide variety of sources from the time period of my project (newspaper accounts, diary entries, photographs, archival accounts, and other first-hand accounts).
- My project uses a depth and range of secondary sources:** I used accounts written by historians and other experts to understand the issues involved in my topic and their long-range significance.
- I make effective use of sources in my website:** Sources are used as evidence for points I am making in the site.



Clarity of Presentation—20%

- My website tells a coherent, well-organized story:** I made sure my website is easy to follow and understand.
- I used the website medium effectively:** My topic lends itself well to the website category. I have used multimedia effectively and actively involved the viewer.
- My website and written materials show attention to detail and make an impact:** My website text and images are carefully written and selected. I have proofread and edited my Annotated Bibliography and Summary Statement.

Special thanks to Sarah Aschbrenner, National History Day in Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Historical Society for permission to adapt its Category Guides. Original version: August 2009. Updated and Revised October 2014: Chicago Metro History Education Center.