

Chicago Metro History Fair Performances

What is a Performance?

The History Fair performance category allows you to create a play that conveys a historical argument with dramatic appeal. Innovative performances have made this category the highlight of many History Fair events.

In creating a performance, it is important to remember that entries in this category are not oral reports about a topic, or dramatic portrayals of a speech written by someone else. You will create a script, with characters, lines, and costumes in order to convey your argument to the audience. Use your imagination!



The Basic Framework

- **Time Limit:** Your performance may not be longer than 10 minutes. This does not include your introduction (which should include ONLY your title and names). Timing will begin after you introduce your project. You will have five additional minutes to set up your props and five additional minutes to take down your set.
- **Media:** Use of slides, mp3 players, computers, or other media within your performance is permitted. You must provide and run all equipment and carry out any special lighting or sound effects.
- **Costumes:** Performers find costumes in a variety of places. You can create your own or have one produced for you. You can also borrow one from your school drama department. You can even wear something simple, like black pants and a white shirt, and signify character changes by adding only a hat, sign, or glasses. No matter what you do, the choice of pieces in the costume, choice of fabrics used and choice of design of the costume must be your own. You do not have to buy or rent expensive historically accurate costumes—indeed, sometimes elaborate costumes can be distracting—but you are expected to consider the appropriateness of your clothing in relation to the time period and the script. For example, a student might wear a plain grey shirt and slacks to represent a Confederate soldier in the Civil War, understanding that a dark blue shirt and slacks wouldn't be appropriate.
- **Script:** You should bring an extra copy of your script to a competition in case you want to review your lines, but you should not include your script with the other written materials presented to your judges.
- **A Live Performance:** The very nature of the performance category means that performances are not pre-recorded. You will perform live in front of an audience of judges and other viewers. Don't be afraid! The people watching your performance will be other students, teachers, or family members who will all be there to support you. Plus, a History Fair performance is easier than acting in a play because YOU researched and wrote the script. You know your stuff!
- **Be sure to check the complete category rules!**

Why Should I Choose the Performance Category?



If you enjoy being on stage and performing in front of an audience, this is the category for you! You should enjoy creative writing and producing scripts. Performances do not require images like documentaries or exhibits, so this category can also be a great outlet if you want to express your ideas creatively, but are limited by your topic and sources. Depending on your topic and script, you may also need access to certain costumes or props to help you tell the story, and the ability to transport them to competitions.

In choosing this category, it's important to think about the appropriateness of your topic for a performance. Is there a character or event that is related to your topic that you can turn into an effective argument about your topic? Will you want to include historical evidence such as quotations or music in your performance?

Performance Rules

Performances allow students to communicate their ideas through a short dramatic and/or humorous play of their own creation. Performances can be an excellent match for students who like to express their ideas verbally.

- ➲ Performances are created by individuals or groups of no more than five students. Only those students listed as entrants may participate in the production.
- ➲ Performances may not exceed ten minutes. The length of the performance must be provided on the Summary Statement.
- ➲ Dramatic performances and props/scenery must be created and performed entirely by the students registered.
- ➲ Students are allowed five minutes to set up and five minutes to remove props. Students should operate all equipment independently. Adults should not assist with set up of props unless necessary for safety.
- ➲ Use of audiovisual equipment within the performance is permitted. Students must provide and run all audiovisual enhancements independently. Remember: the student's own analysis and interpretation should take precedence, not fancy effects.

[See also: "Rules for All Categories"]

IMPORTANT COMPETITION NOTES

Performance students perform their plays live at the competition. When presenting at competition, students should announce *only* their name(s) and title of their project (not school) prior to performing.

Please bring three copies of the following materials to the contest:

- ➲ Summary Statement
- ➲ Annotated Bibliography, separated between primary and secondary sources (see "Rules for All Categories")

Written materials should be printed on plain white paper and stapled together (no binders). Judges will ask to keep at least one copy of the written materials. Performances are followed by a brief interview with the judges.

At the competition, you will be given a designated time to appear for your performance. When the judges call you forward, give them your written materials (Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography). They will read your written work while you set up your props. When they indicate they are ready for you to begin, announce your name(s) and the title of your project only (do not mention your school). *Do NOT give your judges your script.* Next, your performance! It's best to memorize your script. At the conclusion of your performance, your judges will call you forward to ask you a few questions about your project. You will not need a prepared statement in the interview. Once they have asked their questions, you are free to take down your props and relax!

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.

Elements of a History Fair Performance

The Script

Your script is the most important element of your performance. It is the culmination of all your research and conveys your argument to the audience. The script must be an original creation of the student(s) working on the project. History Fair scripts are similar to other types of performances or plays. If you've never seen a script before, check your library or ask your teacher for an example to see how scripts are formatted.

Remember, this isn't a Broadway drama! Since your performance can only be 10 minutes long, you don't have a lot of time for your story. You will be able to include about 5 pages (double-spaced) of script in a History Fair performance.



Scenario, Blocking, and Stage Directions

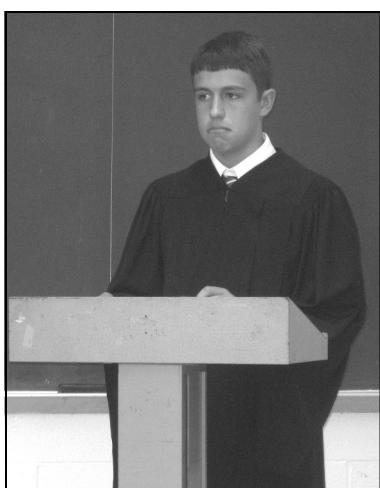
In preparing your performance, it's important to think about how you will present your words to the audience. Before you begin writing your script, consider possible scenarios that might give you a believable and compelling reason to talk to an audience — Are you at a protest rally? Are you in a courtroom? Are you having a debate with someone else? Also, think about how you will deliver your script. Is the character angry? Happy? Sad? Where should you pause for dramatic effect or to let the character's words sink in? Where should each character be on the stage while delivering their lines? How do the characters interact with each other? Thinking about these elements beforehand will help your performance appear polished and consistent.

The Stage

The stage you will use to present your performance will vary at different History Fair competitions. Most likely, you will have a classroom to share your performance. At other competitions, you may find that there is a stage or a platform in a lecture hall or auditorium. You may or may not be able to operate the lights in your performance room. Though your performance room may have a table and chairs, you should not count on being able to use these for your performance. In auditorium settings, chairs and tables are often fixed. You should plan to bring your own if they are needed.

Props and Set

History Fair sets don't have to be elaborate. (In fact, elaborate sets can cause problems when it comes time to move them during competitions. You only have five minutes to set up and an additional five minutes to take down your set.) You will need to bring all props to the event.



Every prop should have a use, and you should use every prop. When you have your script written, make a list of every object that a character **must** use, including furniture. If your list is huge, think about whether all the props are really necessary, or whether you can get away without certain items. Let the audience use their imaginations!

Costumes

An effective costume will help your audience understand who you are as a character and the time period in which your performance takes place. You can make your costume yourself, borrow or rent your costume, or have one produced for you per your design instructions. Second-hand shops and school drama departments have provided many History Fair costumes. Look at photographs, paintings, or costume design books about the time period for inspiration.

Remember, effective costumes do not have to be elaborate. Plain clothing, with simple and symbolic hats or coats, can easily show an audience a range of characters.

Media

You are allowed to include media in your performance, including the use of CD or tape players. Remember, you will need to provide all additional equipment to play these media elements and only group members may operate them.

Tips for Creating a Spectacular Performance

Planning

Remember the History Fair Criteria

Especially in the performance category, it's easy to get caught up in telling a story through drama. It's important to remember the purpose of your performance and the elements that the judges will be looking for:

Argument: A performance should clearly express an argument, just like a written paper. Incorporate it at the beginning to let your audience know what you want them to learn. Make sure to support it with evidence throughout the performance and incorporate it again at the end to remind the audience of your argument.

Historical Context: When researching and creating your performance, you should consider more than just the narrative of the topic. Think about what took place before or during the time period. How did these people, places, or events influence your topic? This historical context is important to understanding your topic and making an argument.

Evidence: Just like other presentation categories, it's important to incorporate historical evidence that supports your argument. What lines can you include in your script that will show this evidence or support? For example, let's say that you are creating a group performance about Susan B. Anthony and the women's voting rights movement in the United States. A pro-voting rights character might give reasons that he or she thinks women should have the right to vote. These don't necessarily have to be quotations from the past, but should be the same arguments that women from the movement gave for demanding the right to vote.

In addition, are there quotations from primary sources, such as letters or diaries, which you can use in your script? Are there photographs, music, or some other source material that you can incorporate into your performance?



Putting It All Together



Be Historically Accurate

Your performance should appeal dramatically to the audience, but this shouldn't be at the expense of historical accuracy. Be creative when you make up characters, imagine scenes, or write dialogue. However, make sure there is a historical basis for the narrative of your performance. It's okay to imagine what Susan B. Anthony might have said to her supporters as she fought for women's right to vote, but it's not appropriate to contend that she fought against the vote. That wouldn't be based on historical fact.

Tips for Creating a Spectacular Performance

Focus on Certain Characters During a Moment in History Rather Than Narrating an Entire Biography or Timeline

The characters depicted in your performance can be real or fictional, as long as they're supported by evidence. Before writing your script, brainstorm a list of people—famous or unknown—who were affected in one way or another by the historical topic you are researching. Consider each person's unique perspective on events. What scenes do you imagine for them as characters in a performance? How could different characters help express your argument? Are there particular moments in time that are a good window to explore the topic?



Establish the Scene Right Away

Who are you? Where are you? What time period are you in? To whom is your character talking? Communicate the "who, what, where, and when" early in your script. This will not only help you give a stronger performance, but will also let the audience tune in to your argument and ideas instead of trying to identify your topic and setting. A dramatic representation is typically much more interesting than a static one. For instance, it's more compelling for an audience to see a moment of conflict or a dramatization of a pivotal historical event, rather than listen to you pretend to be a college professor lecturing to a class for ten minutes. Feel free to portray multiple characters, or the same character at different moments in time to help communicate your story and its long-term significance in history.

Less Can Be More

Remember the purpose of your History Fair performance before getting too involved in elaborate scenes, props, character changes, and costumes. Most of your effort should be put into your research, argument, and a solid script.

Look it Over

The Performance Stands Alone

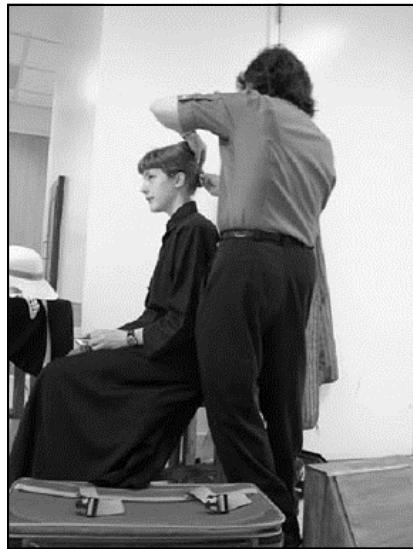
When evaluating History Fair performances, the judges should be able to find all the information about your topic in the performance itself. The performance has to stand on its own. Have someone who has never seen your performance watch it (a friend, teacher, neighbor, etc.). After they have seen the performance, ask them a few questions to see if you have communicated your argument clearly: What am I trying to prove in my performance? What evidence have I shown to support that argument? What do you like about my performance? What is confusing to you?



Planning Your Performance

Research First

Since your research is the basis for your performance, it's only fitting that you should have a strong basis of research before you begin writing your script. No matter how tempting it is to dive in and begin writing a script, it's best to have your research done to understand the full range of possibilities open to you.



Brainstorm Your Options

Having a strong foundation of research will allow you to write a brief description of your topic. Then, think about all the possible answers to the following questions:

- What events, both major and minor, are connected to my topic?
- What characters, both famous and not, are connected to my topic?
- What scenes, both real and imagined, might I use in my performance?

Get Inspired

Check out other types of historical dramas or History Fair performances to get inspired about what you might do through your performance. You can borrow sample performances from the History Fair office, or check out samples online through the national office at <http://www.nhd.org/ProjectExamples.htm>.

Develop Your Characters

Once you've decided on your characters, it's time to "get into your character's head," whether you're portraying a real or fictional person.

- How does the character dress? How does the character speak?
- What is the character's personality or mood?
- What was life like for someone like this character?
- What does the character think about events in his or her time period?
- What kinds of social behavior would someone in this character's time or situation portray?

Outline the Basics of Your Performance

Before you begin writing your script, take the time to outline the basics of your performance. You don't want to get too far into your writing and then realize that a certain aspect of your performance won't work. This is also a great time to think about how you will make transitions in time and characters in your performance, if applicable.

- What sections might break up your performance?
- Where are you stating your argument?
- How does each part of your performance support your argument?
- What evidence (statistics, quotes, etc.) or primary sources might you be able to incorporate and where?
- Where do you show how your topic is connected to the theme? (if applicable)
- How do you address historical context through your performance?

Edit It Down

About five pages of double space script will be enough to fill 10 minutes of performance. You may have to make some difficult decisions as to what you are and are not able to include. Remember that your historical argument and evidence are the most important parts of your performance. When you have finished a draft of your script, highlight the parts that express your argument in one color and specific supporting evidence in a different color. If it looks like there's not enough of one color on the script, it may be time for some editing! It should be easier to see what parts of your performance you may be able to edit out.

Practice, Practice, Practice!

Having a written script in hand is just the beginning. Keep rehearsing to learn your lines and to practice speaking at the right speed, volume and tone. As you go through your lines, take time to block out where your characters will stand, how they will move and what props they might need to use. If possible, ask someone to record your performance. You can watch it later to see how the performance looks from the audience's perspective.

At the Competition

Presenting a project in the performance category at a History Fair competition is similar to presenting projects in other categories. At your assigned time, you will have the chance to share your work with the judges and the audience. This is how a presentation in the performance category usually works:

- **Set-Up:** You have five minutes to set up your set and props for your performance. Your judges will ask for your Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography (no script) before you set up so that they can begin looking at it. Remember, only group members should set up the props and any background. Once you are set up, wait for the judges' signal to begin your performance.
- **Introduction** (mention only your names and title) and **Performance**
- **Take-Down:** Take down your set and move your props to the side of the room or into the hallway. Make sure to be as quiet as possible while you are doing this as there may be other presentations going on in the same area.
- **Interview:** Don't be afraid of the interview! This is your chance to help your judges understand your argument and highlight any cool research that you have done. Remember, the interview isn't a memorized presentation for the judges. You will respond to the questions they ask, such as "How did you choose your topic?" or "Why do you think your topic is significant in history?"

Frequently Asked Questions About Performances

Does my performance have to be memorized?

There isn't a rule that says that your performance has to be memorized, but it's best if it is. Memorizing your script will help you focus on *how* you say your lines versus just reading a script to your audience. Finally, memorized lines contribute to good stage presence, part of the "clarity of presentation" criteria on the History Fair evaluation.

What props might be available at the competition?

To be safe, it's best to bring all the props necessary to a competition. You're likely to find a chair or table at a competition, however, these are not guaranteed. If you have questions, be sure to check with the contest coordinator.

What happens if I go over the time limit?

Going a few seconds over the time limit with your performance isn't the end of the world. Judges will understand that you may be nervous and that this may happen. What isn't appropriate is to go *significantly* over the time limit, as this would give you an unfair advantage over other projects. If you do go significantly over time, the judges will take this into consideration in your final ranking. When planning and rehearsing your performance, try to plan extra time to allow for audience response or forgotten lines at a competition.

What do I give judges at the competition?

Before you begin your performance, your judges will ask for copies of your Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography. You should not give them a copy of your script or original sources.

A Few Final Reminders:

- **Be Confident!** You're the expert on your topic. You've spent a lot of time researching and creating your performance and should be proud of all your hard work.
- **Speak Slowly and Loudly:** It's easy to get nervous and rush through your lines, but take a breath and slow down. This is the first time your audience has seen your performance and they need to be able to hear and understand your words.
- **Have Fun!** The History Fair event is your opportunity to share your ideas with others. Take the time to learn from the other projects you see, meet new people, and enjoy yourself!



What are the Qualities of a Good Performance?

As you create your performance, 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 performance is historically accurate:** All the information in my performance is true to the best of my knowledge.
- My performance 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 intellectual, political, social, and cultural setting for my topic.



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 performance 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. If you choose to use the theme, it should be integrated into the analysis presented in your project. 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 for 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 examples or quotes drawn from sources in my performance:** Sources are used as evidence for points made in my script.



Clarity of Presentation—20%

- My performance tells a coherent, well-organized story:** I made sure my performance is interesting to watch and easy to understand. My performance has a natural flow that makes sense to the audience.
- I used the performance medium effectively:** I crafted a script that communicates a good story in an interesting and compelling way. Performance exhibits strong stage presence.
- My performance and written materials show attention to detail and make an impact:** My words and quotations are carefully written and selected. I have proofread and edited my Summary Statement and Annotated Bibliography.

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