

FROM THE TRENCHES

Advice from an NHD veteran

The following bits of advice are offered by a high school senior who is preparing for her 7th year of NHD competition. She's been there...

- ✓ Prepare the night before...Make sure everything you need is gathered ahead of time in one central location. Don't forget computer equipment, costumes/props, process paper/bibliography copies, all elements of your exhibit, etc. This will make the morning of the contest less stressful.
- ✓ Get a good night's sleep...You will enjoy the competition much more if you haven't been up until all hours the night before.
- ✓ Come early...Check in can be stressful, especially for first-time competitors. Make sure you have ample time for navigation, set-up, and mental preparation.
- ✓ Have a game plan...If your project is an exhibit, paper, or website, you could end up with a lot of free time on your hands. Figure out a place to hang out until awards, a place to eat lunch, and bring something to do, like a book to read or a video game.
- ✓ Know thy enemy...Especially if you or someone with your group is competing in the documentary, exhibit, or performance categories. Go see a few entries when they are open to the public. Not only will you see what others have done, you might get ideas to improve your project if you move on to the next level, or gain some inspiration for next year.
- ✓ Practice makes perfect...On the way to the competition, practice with the sample judges' interview questions, and come up with a few of your own questions that might be asked about your project specifically. The more standard answers you have to standard questions, the more confident you'll be in your ability to think quickly and sound knowledgeable. There is nothing worse than having to tell a judge, "I don't know." If you truly don't know the answer, be prepared to admit you haven't come across it in your research.

- ✓ Bond...This doesn't just apply to group entries. History Day is about having fun, not stressing out. Talk your chaperone into a pre-judging Starbucks run, or go see a movie together after your interview times. Plan a fun lunch or an activity near the contest. At State especially, there is lots to do downtown, and sometimes you can get free museum tickets.
- ✓ Keep in touch...Make sure everyone has a cell phone, or travel in twos or threes so nobody is out of contact. Be sure all phone numbers are saved in everyone's phone (especially the chaperone's) in case someone gets separated from the herd. **BUT REMEMBER TO TURN THOSE PHONES OFF BEFORE JUDGING!**
- ✓ Keep it together...You may be walking a long way with your project, so pack it in a way that is convenient for carrying. Have a carrying case for all electronics, marked with a luggage tag with contact information for the owner. (If it is school equipment, put the information of the person in charge). Make sure all students gather backpacks, purses, cell phones, jackets, etc. when leaving an area.
- ✓ Have a plan B...Make sure all technology has a back-up plan. While documentaries need to be on a DVD, bring a back-up copy, or upload your documentary to YouTube, along with extra DVD's, in case you need to burn another copy. Be sure to have supplies handy for quick repairs to exhibit boards, costumes, props, etc. Anticipate the problems and equip yourself accordingly.
- ✓ History Day is what you make it...You have a choice. You can see NHD as a class assignment, or you can see it as a fun way to do something with a group of friends, and learn a little something along the way. The people who do the best at NHD are those who have fun with NHD. That attitude might even lead you to Nationals!