

Heart of Texas Regional History Fair

Troubleshooting Historical Papers

When the Heart of Texas Regional History Fair 2005 ended, contestants in the historical paper category were disappointed to learn that for the second year in a row, no historical papers would advance to Texas History Day competition. To help students improve entries in this category, historical paper judges were polled and judging sheets were reviewed. Here are some of the key problem areas which often prevent historical papers from earning distinction at the regional fair:

- Failure to adhere to all of the required rules for the historical paper category as well as the general rules applicable to all categories. HOTRHF rules are taken directly from National History Day rules and are posted on the HOTRHF Web site.
- No primary sources cited, or no evidence that cited primary sources were used in the composition of the paper. Winning papers at state and national levels usually far exceed the minimum source requirements.
- Annotated bibliography missing, or the bibliography is not in an acceptable format and separated into primary and secondary sources. Links to guidelines for creating the required annotated bibliography are available throughout the HOTRHF Web site.
- Missing footnotes or endnotes. Judges find evidence of words taken directly from other sources without citation; this constitutes plagiarism and results in disqualification of the project from competition
- The theme of the year not adequately and convincingly addressed. Complete information about the annual theme, as well as topic suggestions for Central Texas students, are available on the HOTRHF Web site.
- Paper merely describes an event, stating only what happened and when. Good historical papers must include analysis and interpretation, a discussion of why an event happened, why it was important, and what its consequences were.
- Failure to place the topic in its historical context.
- Failure to check the accuracy of information taken from Internet sources. All historical sources must be examined critically for accuracy and validity, and this is especially true of Internet sources. Good historical research requires using a variety of sources, including books, magazines, newspapers, journals, as well as primary sources such as diaries, letters, oral history interviews, and census records. Judges consistently judge unacceptable papers that use only Internet sources.