

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Guidance for NHD® Projects

As of October 1, 2026, the use of generative AI to create an NHD project during the 2026-2027 school year is strictly prohibited and may result in disqualification.

Rationale

National History Day® (NHD) students develop projects based on historical research related to an annual theme. Students who participate in NHD contests agree that the work they put forth is their unique academic product. For over 50 years, students have developed and honed historical thinking skills, including verifying sources, building an understanding of historical context, pursuing multiple perspectives, and developing a historical argument supported by credible primary source evidence. **Academic integrity is at the core of NHD.**

Generative Artificial Intelligence (sometimes called Gen AI or gen AI) is an emerging technology and tool that can hallucinate or produce made-up or incorrect information, especially with recent information or when prompted with phrases it does not know. Students may or may not realize that they are being given false information. However, even if the Gen AI tool produces accurate information, the creation, thinking, or analysis is being done **for** the student, not **by** the student.

These systems can make it easier for students to bypass thinking they need to do themselves. Studies have shown that generative AI has the potential to negatively shape young people's development, interactions, and understanding of the world, and is increasingly used to automate decision-making that can have long-lasting and undesirable consequences.¹

Additionally, student safety is at risk. Generative AI systems are designed to simulate human relationships, particularly those encountered in interactive AI platforms, where they serve as companions or experts (e.g., chatbots that provide social or mental health support). These tools could displace or interfere with students' development of critical thinking and research skills.

NHD's Revised Policy

Previously, NHD permitted the use of generative AI for brainstorming topic ideas and finding resources. However, in the best interests of students and their development of historical thinking skills, NHD is instituting new guidance.

Students may not use generative AI for research, analysis, design, or creation of their projects. All aspects of student work must be their own.

¹American Psychological Association, "Artificial Intelligence and Adolescent Well-Being: An APA Health Advisory," accessed September 17, 2026. <https://www.apa.org/topics/artificial-intelligence-machine-learning/health-advisfor-research-analysis-design-or-creation-of-y-a-i-adolescent-well-being>.

This revised policy is supported by current NHD Contest Rules, including the following:

Rule 4: Student Research

“You must complete the research, design, and creation of your project on your own...” (*NHD Contest Rule Book*, page 14).

Rule 10: Reasonable Help

“You are responsible for the research, design, and creation of your entry. Objects created by others specifically for use in your entry violate this rule.” (*NHD Contest Rule Book*, page 17).

What IS allowed:

- ❖ Spelling and grammar-checking programs
- ❖ Bibliography generators like EasyBib and NoodleTools
- ❖ Using Canva to design text and adjust an existing image for brightness and clarity. Students may use Canva fonts for project text or adding decorative designs, such as borders. Students may **not** ask Canva’s AI tool to create new images, generate text, or modify historical images.

What is NOT allowed:

- ❖ Asking ChatGPT or other Gen AI platforms to brainstorm topic ideas
- ❖ Using Gemini or other platforms to find potential sources, archives, or libraries
- ❖ Creating text, images, videos, or audio for a project
- ❖ Using Gen AI tools to revise or rewrite text
- ❖ Requesting feedback from companion chatbots

The Gen AI platforms and tools mentioned here do not constitute a comprehensive list. For more information, please contact registration@nhd.org.

This does not mean that all types of AI are banned. Traditional AI is acceptable to use in an NHD project.

What is the difference between traditional and generative AI?

- ❖ **Traditional:** A tool that uses a set of pre-programmed rules (algorithms) to make logical, predictable, and explainable decisions. Human programmers create the rules, and the AI tool does not operate beyond those boundaries. Examples include:
 - Email platforms that filter out spam
 - Ranking search results on a browser
 - Fraud detection services from a bank
 - GPS navigation that calculates optimal routes
 - Computational assistance that historians might use to analyze large amounts of data

- ❖ **Generative:** A tool that uses information it has learned to infer patterns and produce outputs. Humans ask questions, and the AI tool generates content that may not be accurate, predictable, or explainable.

Examples include:

- Text generation apps like ChatGPT, Claude, and Bard
- Image generators like DALL-E and Midjourney
- AI coding tools like Cursor and GitHub Copilot
- Voice synthesis tools like ElevenLabs

Accessibility

NHD recognizes that each student's learning experience is unique and encourages participation by students with diverse abilities and language proficiency levels. The use of generative AI to ensure that students with disabilities and/or English Language Learners can actively participate in NHD is best determined on an individual basis. Teachers or parents should consult NHD contest officials. For further information, please contact registration@nhd.org.

What Students Must Do for the 2027 NHD Contest if They Used Generative AI Prior to October 1, 2026

NHD understands that many students have already begun work on their projects for the 2027 contest. Students will not be penalized or disqualified if they used Gen AI in the following ways before **October 1, 2026**:

1. Brainstorm topic ideas;
2. Brainstorm keywords to research a topic;
3. Look for resources that can be found in a school or local library; and/or
4. Simplify the language in a source to make it easier to understand.

However, students who used Gen AI before October 1, 2026, are **required** to cite the tools and explain in their process paper and annotated bibliography how they used Gen AI to develop their project. Both MLA² and *The Chicago Manual of Style*³ include citations for Gen AI tools. Gen AI tools are secondary sources.

How Will NHD Determine if Generative AI Has Been Used in a Project?

AI detection tools continue to evolve. If judges are concerned that generative AI was used, NHD will follow procedures similar to those for suspected plagiarism. Decisions will be made by contest officials.

Find the AI Guidance for NHD Students infographic [here](#).

² "How Do I Cite Generative AI in MLA Style? (Updated and Revised)," *MLA Style Center*, updated August 13, 2025, accessed September 17, 2026. <https://style.mla.org/citing-generative-ai-updated-revised/>.

³ The Chicago Manual of Style Online, "The Chicago Manual of Style, 18th Edition," accessed September 17, 2026. <https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/qanda/latest.html>.