**Knowing How to Make a Good Impression on the History Day Judges**

Even with some background about what History Day judging involves, you're probably still nervous. You know that you’ve worked very hard and that your project represents this effort. You even know what the judges are looking for and some possible questions that they might ask. But, while you're setting up, you may see other projects that you think may be better than yours. Don't panic — stage fright is normal, but some simple preparation techniques may make "opening night" a little less stressful.

**Be confident**

Probably the most important thing that you can do to get ready for judging day is to be physically and emotionally prepared. After all, if you feel good about your project and your display and know your subject matter, you'll do just fine. But here are a few specific tips to remember:

* Be sure to get enough sleep the night before.
* Eat a good breakfast.
* Dress neatly and conservatively: no jeans, sandals, T-shirts
* Stand up, look the judges in the eyes, and be polite. (As you always are!) If you don’t understand a question, say, “Would you please repeat the question?”
* Don't eat, chew gum, clutch a drink, etc.

**Enjoy the interview**

The interview is your chance to shine!

* Remember to shake the judges’ hands if they are offered
* Use this time to take a few deep breaths to get the blood flowing to the brain.
* Speak slowly to make sure that the judge understands what you have to say
* Don’t answer without thinking. Slow down, take your time, and ask clarifying questions if you don’t understand what is being asked.

When the judge asks a question, don't wave your arm and say, "It's all here in the project." The judge already knows that and now wants to hear you talk about your project. That's how he or she knows that you truly understand your work. However, you can use your project as a point of reference. If it is an exhibit, take advantage of it to point out statistics, graphs, photos, and other highlights of your project. If it’s a paper, website, or documentary refer to specific pares/sections/images.

The best preparation that you can make for an interview is to:

* **Reread**/**view your project before it is submitted.**

If it’s an exhibit board, take notes the night before set up. If it’s a paper, website, or documentary review the morning before your interview. The judges may very well ask you to define some specific terms, explain quotations, or charts and graphs.

* **Reread your process paper and works cited before your interview.**

The judges may ask you to explain specific sources and/or where you found them.

* **Don’t memorize answers to sample questions.** You don't know exactly what the judges may ask, and over-rehearsing may make you tongue-tied when trying to field an unexpected question.
* **Don’t prepare a speech.** A rehearsed speech sounds exactly like a rehearsed speech, which doesn't give the judges confidence that you truly know your material.
* **Be natural, spontaneous, and most of all, yourself.** Although History Day judges aren't trying to trap or stump you, they do appreciate spontaneous answers that demonstrate that you understand scientific principles.

**Sample questions the judges may ask**

Another helpful hint that may ease pre-interview jitters is knowing some of the judges' most frequently asked questions. Just ask your parents how they'd prepare for a job interview — knowing the possible questions would make them feel much more confident and relaxed. For example, refer to your list of sample questions, most of which are in the guidelines for judges at the History Day in California state finals.

If you don't know an answer, don't try to fake it — the judges always know. Don't be afraid to admit that you're clueless; they don't expect you to know everything. You can make a better impression with your honesty.

**The spirit of enthusiasm**

Besides knowledge, good use of the historical research method, and well developed project, a quality that impresses the judges is your enthusiasm for your subject, your willingness to “dig” for information and to go the extra mile. They are also interested in what you learned that will help you in your academic career.

Because enthusiasm is contagious, let your excitement show. The judges should know that you enjoyed doing a project and being in a History Day. When your interview is over, smile, shake hands, and thank the judge.

To enjoy the History Day, realize that judges are evaluating your project, not you. Notice that they're not looking at your hair, your makeup, or your braces. They're looking at your project and how you present it in written, oral, and graphic form.

Adapted from: *Science Fair for Dummies*