



National History Day California: Generative AI Policy for Student Work

Why this policy was created

NHD asks students to do the work of historians: choose a question, find and read sources, weigh evidence, and build an argument in their own words. Those skills develop only when students do the thinking themselves. **For that reason, NHD-CA does not permit the use of generative AI in any part of student work.**

Policy: Effective October 1, 2026

Students may not use generative AI for any part of an NHD-CA project, and adults may not use generative AI to review or give feedback on student work. All aspects of student work must be their own.

What is Generative AI?

Generative AI is any tool that produces content such as text, images, audio, video, or analysis in response to a prompt or command.

Examples:

- Apps like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and Copilot
- AI features built into programs students already use, such as Canva, Google Docs, and Microsoft Word*
- If a tool creates content for you, it is not allowed, no matter what program it's part of.

*Students may use these programs, but not their AI features, such as tools that write text, generate images, or create designs for you.

Generative AI Policy for NHD-CA Projects

This policy applies to all student work on NHD-CA projects, at every stage, including:

- Choosing and brainstorming a topic
- Research
- Writing, including process papers, annotated bibliographies, and all project text
- Designing and creating the project in any category
- Features that rewrite, rephrase, change tone, or generate text are not allowed, even inside a permitted program.

This applies to all projects entered in any contest.

What is Still Allowed

Students may use:

- Spelling, punctuation, and grammar corrections of the student's own writing are allowed when they correct errors without rewriting sentences, changing wording, or suggesting new content.
- Ordinary search engines, library catalogs, and databases to find sources. See the research section below.
- Standard editing tools that change only the student's own material, such as cropping a photo, trimming a video clip, or adjusting audio volume.
- Tools that transcribe or read aloud the student's own work, such as dictation (speech-to-text) and screen readers (text-to-speech).
- Translation tools to read and understand sources written in other languages. See the translation section below.

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).

Research and AI Search Summaries

Many search engines and databases now show AI-generated summaries at the top of results. An AI summary is not a source. Seeing an AI-generated summary while using a search engine does not by itself violate this policy; students should ignore the summary and locate and read the original sources themselves.

Students may not:

- Use, quote, paraphrase, or cite AI summaries
- Use AI to find, suggest, or list sources, or to build a bibliography

Students must

- Find actual sources using search results and library tools.
- Read those sources themselves.

Why:

- AI tools can invent sources that do not exist, with realistic titles and authors.
- Judges and contest staff may check that sources in a bibliography exist and that the student used them.

Rule 4: Student Research

“You must complete the research, design, and creation of your project on your own.”

(NHD Contest Rule Book, page 14).

Translation Tools

Translation tools, such as Google Translate or DeepL, may be used only to read and understand sources written in other languages.

Students must:

- Note in the annotated bibliography entry when a translation tool was used for a source
- Have a fluent reader, such as a teacher, family member, or community member, check any translated passage quoted in the project, when possible

What this means for students: examples

A simple test: If a tool gives you words, ideas, images, sounds, or analysis that you did not create yourself, you cannot use that material.

Choosing a topic

- **Not allowed:** Asking a chatbot "What are good NHD topics about innovation?" or "Is my topic a good fit for the theme?"
- **Allowed:** Reading the theme book, browsing the library, talking with your teacher, family, or a librarian, visiting a museum or historical society, and exploring NHD's topic resources.

primary sources on your topic; using an AI research assistant inside a database to find or summarize sources.

- **Allowed:** Using a search engine, library catalog, or database to locate sources, then reading them yourself; asking a librarian or archivist for help; following the footnotes and bibliographies in sources you've already found; using a translation tool to read a source written in another language and noting that in your annotated bibliography.

Research

- **Not allowed:** Asking AI to summarize a book, article, or primary source; asking AI to explain the historical context of an event; asking AI for a list of sources, books, or

Writing

- **Not allowed:** Asking AI to draft, outline, rewrite, shorten, or "improve" any text; asking AI to write or suggest a thesis; using AI to write annotations for your bibliography or your process paper; Using an AI citation tool that summarizes, analyzes, or generates content about a source, including annotations; writing any part of your project in another language and using a translation tool to convert it to English.
- **Allowed:** Spellcheck and grammar correction on writing you wrote; asking a teacher or classmate for feedback; getting help with English from a teacher, tutor, or family member; Using a citation-formatting tool to format bibliographic information, as long as the student verifies the citation and the tool does not summarize, analyze, or write an annotation for the source.

Papers

- **Not allowed:** Any AI-drafted or AI-revised sentences.
- **Allowed:** Your own writing, corrected for spelling and grammar.

Exhibits

- **Not allowed:** AI-generated images, backgrounds, maps, or illustrations; AI-written panel text or captions; AI features that generate designs or layouts for you.
- **Allowed:** Designing the layout yourself; using real historical images with proper credit.

Documentaries

- **Not allowed:** AI-generated narration voices, AI-generated music, AI-generated images or video, AI-written scripts, and AI "colorized," "restored," or animated versions of historical photos.
- **Allowed:** Recording your own narration; using real historical footage, images, and music with proper credit; standard editing such as cutting, transitions, and volume adjustment.

Performances

- **Not allowed:** AI-written scripts, dialogue, or song lyrics; AI-generated music or sound effects; AI-designed costumes or sets.
- **Allowed:** Writing and staging your own performance.

Podcasts

- **Not allowed:** AI-generated narration voices, AI-generated music, and AI-written scripts
- **Allowed:** Recording your own narration; using real audio and music with proper credit; standard editing such as cutting, transitions, and volume adjustment.

Posters

- **Not allowed:** AI-generated images, backgrounds, maps, or illustrations; AI-written panel text or captions; AI features that generate designs or layouts for you.
- **Allowed:** Designing the layout yourself; using real historical images with proper credit.

Students with Documented Accommodations

Accommodations in a student's IEP or Section 504 plan are accepted for all NHD-CA contests.

One limit: No accommodation permits AI to create project content, including text, images, analysis, a thesis, or lists of sources. Judges evaluate the student's own research, analysis, and argument, and that must remain the student's own work. If you have questions about accommodations and AI, contact at registration@nhd.org.

Teachers, judges, and other adults

Applies to: Teachers, judges, mentors, and other adults working with students on NHD-CA projects.

Adults may not:

- Use generative AI to review, give feedback on, or evaluate student work, including a student's topic, research, writing, thesis, sources, or project
- Enter student work into generative AI tools for any reason

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

AI detection tools continue to evolve. If judges and contest officials have reason to believe that generative AI was used, NHD-CA will follow procedures similar to those for suspected plagiarism. Decisions will be made by contest officials.

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 Style³ include citations for Gen AI tools. Gen AI tools are secondary sources.

Questions

Contact: nhdca@scoe.net

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

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