

Preparing Students for the School Social Studies Fair



Faculty Orientation

In past years, involvement of the faculty in social studies project development has been accomplished in several ways:

- Advanced studies and other individual social studies teachers assign projects as part of their coursework;
- Interdisciplinary teams work together to teach and coach students in the aspects of the projects related to their content areas (e.g., literacy, social studies, and topics/issues related to STEM);
- Gifted program and collaborative teams of teachers contract with students to complete projects related to content area courses; and
- Vertical teams of teachers (elementary, middle, and high school teachers) scaffold the steps in project development over 2-3 years.

Whether a superintendent, a principal, a team of teachers, or an individual teacher decides to require or make the opportunity available to students, all personnel involved should meet to discuss dates and guidelines, to determine the tasks to be accomplished, and to delegate responsibility for each task.



Student Orientation

As a first step in the instruction process, students should receive an orientation to the purpose, components, and steps in the process of the development of social studies fair projects specific to the GCSS social studies fairs.

Required components include a research summary paper, a visual display, an abstract, and an interview with at least one of the students involved in the development of the project. The components will be explained in the project development steps that follow and in the correlated appendices.

Teachers may share photos of past projects (see website documents with past

winners), topics addressed in past winning projects, and diagrams of components in a media presentation and may recruit past winners or other resource personnel to introduce students to the concept.



Selection of Topics/Research Questions

Directing teachers should lead students in the selection of a well-defined social studies topic that is neither too limited nor too broad. [Guidelines for Students: Selecting a Topic](#) provides further explanation of the terms *limited* and *broad*. An example of lesson procedures for topic selection can be found in [Social Studies Research: Preparing Student Projects](#). Individuals who work in social studies-related fields may be invited to make presentations that spur topics; teachers may conference with individuals or groups to finalize the topics; and contracts may be used to communicate the process to students and parents.

Although the *title* of the project is not required to be in question form, the formulation of a research question that clearly defines the focus of the project is the first step in the research process. The research question must be discussed in the research summary paper and appear on the project board. All data in the paper and on the project board should relate to the answer to the question (conclusion).

Topics should clearly fall within one of the social studies disciplines ([Descriptions of Social Studies Disciplines](#)). The discipline must be identified on the official entry form that accompanies the project throughout all levels of competition.

When the project is completed, the topic should be well developed, and the conclusion (answer to the research question) should be supported by evaluation and interpretation of data. Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the Judges' Scoring Sheet to review judging criteria related to topic selection before, during, and following this step.



Confirming the Plans

Once the student has identified a particular topic for exploration and formulated a research question, a “contract” listing all requirements, benchmarks, deadlines, and the research question may be issued by the teacher and signed by the student and parents.

A contract is not required as part of the project, but experienced directing teachers have found that students are more self-directed in their research, that the parents are more likely to provide the necessary support, and that the supervising teachers themselves are more likely to give feedback and connect students with resources beyond the classroom when everyone is clear on the expectations from the onset. This procedure also gives teachers and parents an opportunity to screen the selected topic for appropriateness for a student’s grade level and maturity. Examples of contracts from experienced teachers may be found under [Teacher Resources](#).



Establishing Methodology

Establishing and implementing a research methodology is another required component of the project and must be reported in the summary paper and on the project board. Methodology includes the steps in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data used to answer the research question, and **does not include steps in writing the paper or constructing the display**.

Experts from social studies fields in higher education or research careers related to the topic are the best sources of suggestions for appropriate methodology.

Methodology should include a variety of resources, and the outcome of each type of methodology used may lead to the use of another. Successful projects have utilized as many resources and tools of methodology as needed to answer the research question. A list of possible sources of information and tools for methodology may be found in [Social Studies Sources/Resources/Tools](#).

Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the Judges’ Scoring Sheet to review judging criteria related to methodology before, during, and following this step.



Collecting, Analyzing and Interpreting the Data

Once an appropriate methodology has been established, students may begin using the selected processes and instruments to collect information related to the research question. Data should first be organized in some logical format. Charts, tables and other graphic organizers may be used to record information in a form that clarifies the relationship of the data. Once the data is organized, students may use critical thinking processes to interpret the data and make inferences that lead to a conclusion. **It is the role of the supervising teacher to lead students in using critical thinking processes that lead to logical conclusions based on sufficient data.** Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the Judges' Scoring Sheet to review judging criteria related to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. To connect this step to the Georgia Standards of Excellence, see [Information Processing Skills](#).



Writing the Summary Papers and Abstracts

When a sufficient amount of information to reach a conclusion has been analyzed and interpreted, the student should write a draft of the research paper that includes the components described in the [Components](#) document and [Research Summary Paper Format](#). Teachers should review the draft, and students should make revisions and corrections, if needed.

The abstract, which should be written on an index card after the paper is completed, will be given to the judges by the student to use as an overview at the beginning of the interview. An example of an abstract may be found under [Abstract Sample](#).

Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the [Judges' Scoring Sheet](#) to review judging criteria related to summary papers and abstracts before, during, and following this step.



Constructing the Visual Presentation

Criteria for the display may be found in Art teachers and other adults talented in visual display development may be enlisted to coach students in developing the best layout for their information. It is a good idea to have students submit a draft of their proposed layout for suggestions before beginning to work on the display and to check the use of space before attaching any items to the board. If models are used in the display, they should be student designed and constructed, rather than commercially prepared.

Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the Judges' Scoring Sheet to review judging criteria related to the visual presentation before, during, and following this step. The [Project Components](#) document and the [Basic Design of the Visual Presentation](#) document also provide more information.



Preparing for the Interview

Students may prepare for the interview by having teachers or parents practice with them. Students should be able to give a brief overview of the development of their project and should be prepared to answer questions about importance of their research question/problem, methodology, sources, research findings, and conclusion. Often judges will ask students to explain their reasons for choosing the topic, to evaluate their work (suggest what might be done differently or additionally if the student were to do the project again), or to recommend what next steps could or should be taken regarding the topic.

Teachers, students, and other supporting adults should refer to the Judges' Scoring Sheet to review judging criteria related to the interview before, during, and following this step.



Competition Day

Teachers and parents should prepare students for competition day by making sure that all steps have been completed, that students are aware of the competition location and schedule, and that they have transportation.

This is also an excellent opportunity to reinforce desirable character traits that will aid them in making the most of the experience and to advise students as to suitable attire and grooming for participating in competitive endeavors

