

What is a Historical Documentary?

NHD documentaries present information about an event, person, place or idea from the past through a ten-minute presentation that showcases documents, images, photographs, and actual footage of the topic you are researching. Your documentary needs to have both primary and secondary research but also be an original production.

How is a Documentary Different from Other Categories?

Creating a documentary is different from other categories because of the technology necessary. Before deciding to create a documentary, you should ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I interested in using computers, cameras, and other technologies?
- Can I conduct and record interviews for the purpose of including film clips in the documentary?
- Can I find film clips to use in my documentary?
- Are there enough still photographs related to my topic and that I can use in my documentary?
- Do I have access to equipment that will be needed to make a documentary?
- Is creating a documentary the best way to show off my topic?

Getting Started

Create a Documentary Notebook to write down all of your ideas and keep your research organized. Watch historical documentaries and write a list of what you think makes a great historical documentary.

Make sure you have access to:

- a computer
- a video camera
- editing software
- supplies: batteries, blank DVDs or videotapes, paper, pens, props

Research the topic first. One way to choose your topic is to select a commonly known story and then find a different angle that brings something new to it. Remember that there are many unknown stories that also should be told. Regardless of the topic you select, choose one that truly interests you, and remember to put it into historical context.

Keep a database. It is important that you have a database where you keep track of all of the information you are gathering. A database is simply any place where you can collect and easily access your sources and production materials.

Create a timeline. Before you jump into your project, it is a good idea to create a preliminary timeline of when you want to finish important steps along the way, especially the start and end dates of pre-production, research, production, and post-production.

Create a budget. On the practical side, you need to have a sense of the costs of doing this project. Remember you don't have to break the bank to make a film. Spending more money does not make a film better in quality.