Victims of Communism-Florida

STUDENT HANDBOOK 2026-2027

Website: https://vocflorida.org/

Victims of Communism – Florida (VOCFL) enables high school students to learn first-hand about Victims of Communism by augmenting Florida's curriculum on this topic so that young people will understand why hundreds of millions of victims have died under Communist rule over the past century. In their research for competitive scholarships, students in Manatee, DeSoto and Sarasota County public, private, and home schools compare the tyranny of Communist governance against the Constitutional protections Americans have enjoyed for the past 250 years. Our mission is to build strong, responsible leaders who value the U.S. Constitution, personal integrity, academic excellence, patriotism, and civic involvement.

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Victims of Communism-Florida Invitation Letter

Dear VOC-Florida Scholarship Candidate,

In 2022, Governor DeSantis approved the recognition of November 7 as the day to commemorate the Victims of Communism. Each year we will honor and reflect on the horrific loss of life and livelihoods of well over one hundred million people as a direct result of this political ideology.

VOC-Florida is inviting you to engage in a scholarship competition to address the ongoing threat of Communism around the world. If you participate in this program, you can choose from three categories of presentation forms: **written essays, scholastic exhibits, or oratorical presentations**. Each of these presentation types also offers you an opportunity to reuse and adapt this same academic research material to participate in other similar scholarship competitions, and we will provide you with information on them in an addendum to this Handbook.

Students in Manatee, DeSoto, and Sarasota County public, private, and home schools are welcome to participate, from their freshmen through senior years. To give you the necessary context, you must attend a **one-day Workshop** at the SCF Lakewood Ranch campus on 11/14/26. Registration will begin that morning at 09:00; the program will start promptly at 09:30. If there is sufficient space, you may bring one parent or guardian with you. We will register the first 30 parents or guardians who sign up. The judging competition for oratory presentations and exhibits will take place on Saturday, January 9, 2027, at the West Bradenton Baptist Church.

You will have a chance at up to a $5,000 Scholarship for the tertiary educational or vocational institution of your choice. We are excited to be able to offer you this opportunity to realize the benefits of our program.

VOCFL's Scholarship Awards will be presented on February 4 at 6:30 pm at the LWR SCF auditorium located in the Center for Technology and Innovation. All participating students and their parents/guardians are welcome to attend. The scholarship funds will be awarded directly to the winners by VOCFL. (We **strongly urge** that the parents/guardians immediately put that cash into a 529 education account for their son or daughter.)

Please download and print this entire document from our website and bring it with you to our Workshop on Saturday, November 14.

Best Regards,

VOCFL President

Jack May

Message from Governor DeSantis in 2022

"At a time when Marxism, socialism, and communism are actively promoted by prominent politicians and pop-culture figures in our own country, it is more important than ever to teach Florida's schoolchildren about the horrific history of Communist countries and to provide them with opportunities to hear from individuals who suffered under the rule of Communist dictators,"

said **Governor Ron DeSantis**. "That is why I established Victims of Communism Day."

Then, on April 17, 2024, at the Bay of Pigs Museum in Miami, Governor DeSantis signed a second bill, Senate Bill (SB) 1264-2024, called "An Act relating to the History of Communism…." Beginning this year -- in the

2026-27 school year, Florida public school students in all grades will study the history of Communism, both inside the United States, and internationally, with a particular emphasis on Cuba and other Latin American countries. In addition to learning about the atrocities committed in foreign countries under Communist rule, Senate Bill 1264 also requires age-appropriate "[c]omparative discussion of political ideologies, such as communism and totalitarianism, which conflict with the principles of freedom and democracy essential to the founding principles of the United States."

https://www.theepochtimes.com/us/florida-gov-desantis-signs-anti-communist-education-bill-into-law-5631423?utm_source=ref_share&utm_campaign=copy

This last requirement actually is the point of our established scholarship program about the Victims of Communism for Manatee, DeSoto, and Sarasota County students to study. Your research projects will focus on the differences between how citizens of Communist countries have been and/or are treated by their governments, versus how American citizens are, and can expect to be, treated by our own government. The freedoms, rights, and responsibilities outlined for us by our Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Bill of Rights, "Federalist Papers" and other founding documents written for us in the late 1700s will still endure – so long as "We the People" remain vigilant in holding our government accountable.

The 2022 FL House Bill:
https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2022/395/BillText/er/PDF

The 2024 FL Senate Bill:

https://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2024/1264/BillText/er/PDF

PLEASE READ THIS!

Before you begin work on your entry, you and your parents should read this Handbook carefully. It contains rules and guidelines that you must follow to compete in the VOCFL competition. Also:

1. A parent or guardian must sign the Permission Slip on the vocflorida.org website.
2. You must register your project Topic (Communist leader) and Category (type of presentation) on the VOCFL website by November 21.
3. You can change your mind and edit that entry online by January 1, 2027, before the exhibit and oratory projects are due on January 9. (NOTE: Essays must be submitted online by January 2.)
4. More information about topics, sources, and deadlines is available from your VOCFL Contest Coordinators.

Find your Coordinators, Jim Pesnichak, Mark Stanoch, and Eileen Settineri, at the end of this Handbook and at: https://VOCFlorida.org

Also note that, along with a limited Resource Library on the VOCFL website, an important research source is the national website for Victims of Communism at: https://Victims of Communism | Keep the flame of liberty alive

ABOUT THE CONTEST

Through your participation in this contest, you will experience important benefits beyond learning about interesting issues, ideas, people, and events of your choosing related to various Communist leaders.

You will hone your expressive abilities as you demonstrate command of your topic and present your work in one of the competition's three formats: written essays, scholastic exhibits, or oratory (speech) presentations.

At our required Workshop on November 14, 2026, to be held at the State College of Florida LWR Campus in the Selby Community Room of the Center for Innovation and Technology, you will have the opportunity to meet students from other schools, exchange ideas with actual victims (survivors) of Communism, and then later, demonstrate the results of your work. Your success in researching and producing a quality academic entry may earn you a VOCFL scholarship.

Definitions

ENROLLMENT: The VOCFL program is organized on our website, and the contest is open for enrollment from September 21 through November 12. Please enroll at https://VOCFlorida.org

CONTEST YEAR: Students may enroll in the VOC-Florida "Victims of Communism" scholarship program every year. Work on a project can begin after each student selects a topic from the list below, and the students will be able to engage more deeply in their research after the Workshop in December.

RULES FOR ENTRY:

Multiple entries (in any category) or reusing research from a previous year's project will result in disqualification. One project may be entered once within a contest year.

FAIR USE: The use of copyrighted material for your project falls under the Fair Use doctrine, which identifies educational use for non-commercial purposes as acceptable with certain limitations. You should not place your project in a non-academic public setting, such as a commercial Internet site, without obtaining permission from the copyright owner. Read more here: http://www.copyright.gov/fls/fl102.html

PLAGIARISM/AI: A good definition of plagiarism is presenting the work or ideas of others in ways that give the impression that they are your own (copying information word-for-word without using both quotations and citations, paraphrasing an author's ideas without proper attribution, or using visuals or music without giving proper credit). Plagiarism in any form will result in disqualification from the contest, as will the inappropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) in your final project. While you may use AI for gathering information, your entry must be your work, with your own analysis and characterizations. Note: we will scan all written project material for the use of AI.

RULE INFRACTIONS: Failure to comply with the rules will count against your entry but will only result in disqualification as delineated immediately below. Judges will take any rule infractions into consideration in their final rankings.

DISQUALIFICATION: Removal of an entry from competition. A project may be disqualified from the contest on four grounds:

1. Plagiarizing all or part of the VOCFL project. Please note that failing to give proper credit is plagiarism.

2. Reusing anyone's project (or research from a project) from a previous year.

3. Tampering with any part of the project of another student.

4. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to provide the analysis, conclusions, and/or meaning of your project.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: This means describing or otherwise providing appropriate settings in which to understand your subject's time period. Settings might include relevant physical, economic, political, intellectual, and/or socio-cultural characteristics of the place and time.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: This means providing an understanding of a topic's development in its time, over time, and its influence.

PRIMARY SOURCE: Something that was written or produced in the time period you are investigating (letters, speeches, diaries, newspaper articles from the time, oral history interviews of people from the time, documents, photographs, artifacts, and anything else that provides firsthand accounts about a person or event). This definition also applies to primary sources found on the Internet. A letter written by President Lincoln in 1862 is a primary source for a student researching the Civil War era. An article about the Vietnam War published in 2001 and not written by an eyewitness or participant about his or her experience is not a primary source. An interview with an expert (such as a professor of Vietnamese history) is not a primary source, UNLESS that expert actually lived through and has firsthand knowledge of the events being described. Primary materials such as quotes from historical figures or photographs of historical events, when found in secondary sources, can be used effectively in VOCFL projects; however, these are not considered primary sources.

NOTE: Check out the "Conducting Research" page in the Contest section on the National History Day website at http://www.nhd.org for additional help on primary sources.

SECONDARY SOURCE: A source by an author who was not an eyewitness or a participant in the historical event or period. Secondary sources are interpretations of primary sources, research, and study. Secondary sources provide context for a historical event. For example, high school history textbooks and history books about a particular topic are secondary sources; so are biographies and reference sources such as encyclopedias. This definition also applies to descriptive articles or information found on the Internet.

II Program Overview

A.Theme

VOCFL Themes – Various examples of Communist rule in many different countries around the globe qualify to be addressed in the VOCFL scholarship competition:

Mandatory VOCFL topics and Analysis Points for Scholarship Consideration

1. Select one **Topic** (Communist Leader)
2. Include both **Analysis Points** (1&2) in your Project (Essay/Exhibit/Oratory)

Topics (Specific Communist Leaders)

- Vladimir Lenin and the Russian Revolution
- Josef Stalin and the Soviet System
- Mao Zedong and the Chinese Cultural Revolution

- North Korea's Kim Dynasty (you may research any or all of them: Kim Il Sung; Kim Jong Il; and/or Kim Jong Un)
- Romania: Nicolae Ceausescu and the Romanian Communists
- Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution
- Ho Chi Minh and North Vietnam's Viet Minh Independence Movement
- Pol Pot and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge
- Daniel Ortega and Nicaragua's Sandinista Movement
- Nicolás Maduro and Venezuela's Chavismo Movement.

(Note: If you wish to research a Communist leader not listed here, please contact the Contest Coordinators for approval.)

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Judges Ratings Focus:

As you research your project, regardless of the Topic or Category, be aware the Judges will focus on how you address the following two points. You must include both analysis points, addressing two or more of the concepts in Point 1 as appropriate to convey the message in your research project.

Analysis Point 1:

- How the Communist leader you've chosen shaped his country's political, economic, educational, judicial, and/or social systems to reflect his personal ideology and how that affected ordinary citizens.

- How his actions conflict(ed) with the principles of freedom, capitalism, and democracy. Identify how authoritarian regimes victimize their citizens by:
    - Restricting individual rights and choices, resulting in poverty, starvation, migration, and systemic lethal violence
    - Suppressing freedom of speech and religion using state-controlled violence.
    - How Communism impacts the principles of:
        1. Democracy (Political power in the people's hands, expressed as one citizen, one vote, in free and fair elections)
        2. Rule of law (Due process; both government and citizens honor the law)
        3. Federalism (Distribution of power between the national government and state and local governments)
        4. Individual freedoms and rights, including private ownership of property and businesses
        5. Limited government
        6. Republicanism (Representative government; consent of the governed)
        7. Separation of powers (Principles of checks and balances between the three branches)

Analysis Point 2:

Using evidence from your research, compare how the government under your selected Communist leader exercised power and treated its citizens

against the principles and practices of the United States' Constitutional republic. Reference the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or the Bill of Rights to explain differences in government power and individual rights.

B. Topic Development

Effective VOCFL entries not only describe events or developments made by your chosen individual or his system or movement, but they also analyze and place them in their historical context. To help you draw conclusions about your topic's significance in history, ask yourself the following questions:

- How was my topic (leader) significant in history in relation to the VOCFL theme of state-controlled violence and victimization of his own citizens?
- How did my topic develop over time?
- How did my topic influence history?
- How did the events and atmosphere (social, economic, political, and cultural aspects) of my topic's time period influence my topic in history?
- Why is my topic important, particularly in relation to the United States' Constitutional governance model at that time, or over time?

C. Contest Categories

You must participate in one of three categories:

- Written essay
- Exhibit (free standing display with pictures and/or videos)
- Oratory (speech)

Each category is judged separately.

NOTE: Choose a category in which you can make the best use of your unique abilities, talents, and interests. Be careful to choose the most suitable category in which to present your research and conclusions and take into consideration the availability of equipment and resources. You should also consider which categories can be reused for other scholarship competitions.

D. Rewards for Participation

The most important rewards are the skills and new knowledge that you will acquire as you move through the VOCFL program. The winners of the best essay, oratory and exhibit competitions will receive a $1,000 scholarship. The overall winner of the VOCFL competition will be awarded a $5,000 scholarship. In addition, since the VOCFL scholarship program is similar to other patriotic and Constitution-based scholarships, we have specifically designed our program to enable students who are interested in applying for multiple, similar scholarships to re-use and adapt their same VOCFL historical research to qualify for those other scholarships. Or, you may choose to adapt and reapply your research from an earlier program (e.g., Veterans of Foreign Wars) to the VOCFL scholarships.

Such scholarships include:

1. The Veterans of Foreign Wars' "Voice of Democracy" scholarships
2. The American Legion's Oratorical Contest
3. The National History Day/Manatee History Day Contest
4. The Dissident Project's Essay Contest

Information on these scholarships is provided in a separate addendum. Please remember you must adapt your work product to meet the specific academic criteria for each scholarship program.

E. Important Notice for all VOCFL Contestants

All contests are held in public areas. You are solely responsible for the security and safety of your own equipment and artifacts. VOCFL program officials and sponsors will not be responsible for the loss of, or damage to, exhibits, props, equipment, or personal belongings.

III. Rules for All Categories

A. General Rules for All Categories

Rule 1 | **Theme:** Your entry must relate clearly to the VOCFL theme of Victims of Communism and meet all the Topic Analysis requirements as described above. Within your chosen analysis points, you must explain your topic's significance in history, and how its practices compare to those of America's Constitutional republic.

Rule 2 | **Contest Participation:** You may participate in the research, preparation, and presentation of only one VOCFL entry each contest year.

Rule 3 | **Individual Entries:** An essay, individual exhibit, or oratory presentation must be the work of only one student.

Rule 4 | **Development Requirements:** Entries submitted for competition must be original and have been researched and developed in the current contest year. Revising or reusing an entry from a previous year—whether it is yours or another student's—will result in disqualification. The contest year begins on September 21, culminating in a scholarship award ceremony, this school year on February 4, 2027.

Rule 5 | **Construction of Entry:** You are responsible for the research, design, and creation of your entry. You may receive help and advice from teachers and parents on the mechanical aspects of creating your entry, such as typing and formatting your paper and other written materials. You may seek guidance from your teachers as you research and analyze your material, but your conclusions must be your own. You may have reasonable help preparing your project.

Examples of reasonable help include:

- A parent or teacher instructs you on how to use an editing software program.
- A parent uses a cutting tool to cut the exhibit board or performance prop that you designed.
- A teacher offers editing suggestions on your historical paper or shows you how to use super-scripts and footnotes or endnotes for citations.
- A mentor may provide context on your topic as either a primary or secondary source.

NOTE: Objects created by others specifically for use in your entry violate this rule. Examples include a parent editing your essay or an artist drawing the backdrop for your exhibit. You may receive reasonable help in carrying and placing props and exhibits.

Rule 6 | **Tampering with Another VOCFL Entry:** You may not tamper with, deface, or alter another student's entry. Doing so will result in your project's disqualification.

Rule 7 | Contest Day Deadline: Two categories of submissions, the exhibits and oratorical presentations, are due on January 9, 2027. The written essays must be uploaded to the VOCFlorida.org website by

January 2, 2027. When the oratorical presentations and exhibits are judged at West Bradenton Baptist Church Family Life Center, 1305 43rd St W, Bradenton, FL, on that same date: Saturday, January 9, 2027, also starting at 10:00 am, each of the top five essay finalists will be required to meet with the judges to answer a few questions. This will enable the judges to determine the very best entries.

Rule 8 | **Setup:** You are responsible for setting up your own exhibit, equipment, or props at the contest. You may have reasonable help carrying them, but setup must be completed by you.

Rule 9 | **Supplying Equipment:** You are responsible for supplying all props and equipment. All entries should be constructed with transportation, setup time, size, and weight in mind (e.g., foam board versus solid oak for an exhibit, folding table versus antique desk to display it on, etc.). You must provide your own equipment, including computers and software, unless the contest coordinator has specified that certain equipment will be provided at the contest venue. In this case, VOCFL will provide folding tables and chairs for your use. Be prepared.

Rule 10 | **Discussion with Judges:** In all three categories, you should be prepared to answer judges' questions about the content and development of your entry and to explain the design, research, and creation of your entry, as appropriate. Judges need to know that your entry is the result of your own work. However, you may not give a formal, prepared introduction, narration, or conclusion as you answer the judges' questions. Let their questions guide the interview. Ultimately, for exhibits specifically, your entry should be able to stand on its own without any additional comments from you.

Rule 11 | Prohibited Materials: Items potentially dangerous in any way—such as weapons, firearms, animals, organisms, plants, etc.—are strictly prohibited. Such items will be confiscated by contest officials. Replicas of such items that are obviously not real are permissible. Contact your Contest Coordinator to confirm guidelines before bringing the replica to the contest.

Rule 12 | Title: Your entry must have a title that is clearly visible on all written materials.

B. Required Written Material for All Entries

Rule 13 | Written Material: Your entry must include the following written material in the order presented below:

1. A title page as described in Rule 14;

2. An annotated bibliography as described in Rule 15.

Rule 14 | Title Page: A title page is required as the first page of written material in every category. Your title page must include only the title of your entry, your name, and the contest category in which you are entered, and applicable word counts. Please see Figure 1 below for examples of required elements for the essay, exhibit, and oratory presentation categories.

NOTE: The title page must not include any other information (pictures, graphics, borders), except for that described in this handbook.

Figure 1| Sample Title Pages



Name

Historical Essay

Paper Length: 2,234 words

Title

Name

Exhibit

Student-Composed

Words: 489

Title

Name

Oratory Presentation

Length of Pres: (X) Mins

Rule 15 | **Annotated Bibliography:** An annotated bibliography is required for all categories. List only those sources that contributed to the development of your entry, i.e., sources that provided usable information or new perspectives in preparing your entry. Sources of visual and audio materials and oral interviews must be included. Bundle photos or other

materials from the same collection into a single citation. Your annotated bibliography is not included in the word count. For example: Bates, Daisy. "The Long Shadow of Little Rock." New York: David McKay Co. Inc., 1962, pp. 24-30.

NOTE: Oral history transcripts, correspondence between you and experts, questionnaires, and other primary or secondary materials used as sources for your entry should be cited in your bibliography but not included as attachments to your bibliography.

Rule 16 | Style Guides: Style for citations and bibliographic references must follow the principles in a recent edition of one of the following style guides: 1. Kate L. Turabian, "A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers"; or 2. Joseph Gibaldi, "MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers." Regardless of which manual you use, the style must be consistent throughout all written material. Here is an example of citations shown in a written text, along with the annotated bibliography below:

The second major issue debated at the Yalta Conference was the destiny of the Polish state. The Polish nation fluctuated between existence and partition throughout European history. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles created the modern Polish state. In 1939, Germany demanded land and economic concessions from the nation, and the Polish government refused to concede to these demands. On March 31, 1939, Poland signed an agreement with Great Britain and France in which these nations promised to provide aid to Poland if attacked by Germany. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland with two army groups while stationing the German Navy to prevent a British attack from the sea.[i] Warsaw was surrounded by September 17, and after heavy bombing raids, surrendered ten days later.[ii] Poland was overrun quickly, "with a speed that astonished the rest of the world."[iii] The Polish government and military leaders fled to France, and later to London. Poland remained occupied for most of the war.

Soviet troops finally took control of Warsaw in January 1945. Poland was largely "written off at Yalta," despite the fact that it fought with the Allied powers in exile.[iv] The representatives at the Yalta Conference made the following decision regarding the Polish state: A new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army. This calls for the establishment of a Polish Provisional Government…which is now functioning in Poland should therefore be reorganized on a broader democratic basis with the inclusion of democratic leaders from Poland itself and from Poles abroad. This new Government should then be called the Polish Provisional Government of National Unity.[v]

i. James L. Stokesbury, "A Short History of World War II" (New York: Harper, 1980), 69--71.

ii. John Keegan, "The Second World War" (New York: Penguin, 1989), 46.

iii. Stokesbury, "A Short History of World War II," 75.

iv. Keegan, "The Second World War," 542.

v. "The Yalta Agreement," The Avalon Project, Yale Law School, last modified 2008, accessed January 3, 2014, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/yalta.asp.

Rule 17 | Plagiarism and AI: You must acknowledge in your annotated bibliography all sources used in your entry. Failure to credit sources is plagiarism and will result in disqualification. Similarly, as you and your parents or guardians sign the online registration jot-forms on the VOCFlorida.org website, both of you will be required to certify that your final product's analysis and conclusions will not be AI-generated. As with plagiarism, if the judges determine that an entry was in fact largely AI-produced, it will be disqualified. If you do use AI to gather information in your research, cite it as you would with other sources, including in your bibliography.

Rule 18 | **Award Presentations:** The scholarships will be awarded on February 4, 2027, at 6:30: $1,000 each for the best written essay, oral presentation, and exhibit; $5,000 for the best overall presentation.

C. Entry Procedures: For this VOCFL scholarship competition you must:

1. Register online, meet specific deadlines, and follow the procedures established by the Contest Coordinators.
2. The Parental Consent Form must be signed on the website in advance of the November 14 Workshop.

You are responsible for knowing and meeting the deadlines, which are:

3. Online registration begins on Sept 21 and ends on November 12.
4. Mandatory Participation in the one-day Workshop on November 14, which will be held at the SCF LWR Campus, Selby Community Room in the Center for Innovation and Technology, from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. (NOTE: All Manatee County public high school students will earn three Voluntary Service Hours under the Bright Futures Scholarship for attending the VOCFL Workshop.)
    a. Register your project title and the category on the VOCFL website by November 21 (you can change your mind—just resubmit your entry before January 1).
5. Completion of all projects by January 9:
    a. <u>Upload and submit written essays one week earlier (Jan 2).</u>

b. Present oratories and exhibits at West Bradenton Baptist Church, Family Life Center, 1305 43rd St W, Bradenton, FL, on January 9, 2027, beginning at 10:00 am.

c. Also, the top five essay writers will be notified by January 7 and required to attend the judging day as well to answer a few questions each from the essay judges about the content of their submissions to determine the very best essay.

D. Rules for Participation in the Mandatory Workshop

- Attendance at the November 14 Workshop, at the SCF LWR Campus in its entirety, is required for participation.
- Video/audio recording or photography during the Workshop is not allowed in order to protect some of the speakers from ongoing threats from Communist regimes.
- All participants must be pre-registered in order to attend the Workshop. Walk-ins will not be permitted.
- Participation is limited to high school students residing in Manatee and Sarasota Counties. Up to 30 students may bring one parent or guardian.
- The program will be strictly limited to the first 100 students enrolled in the program.
- The Parental Consent Form must be signed on the website in advance of the 11/14/26 Workshop.
- Participants will have 9 weeks to complete their work products prior to Judging on Saturday, January 9; (only 8 weeks for the essayists).
- Awards will be presented on Thursday, February 4, 2027, at 6:30 pm.

IV. Individual Category Rules

A. Written Essay

An essay is the traditional form of presenting historical research, and it must conform to all general and category rules. Your essay should be grammatically correct and well written.

A1: Length Requirements

• Essays must be between 2,000 and 3,000 words.

• Each word or number in the text of the paper counts as one word. This includes student-composed text as well as quotes from primary or secondary sources.

• The 3,000-word limit does not apply to foot- or endnotes, the annotated bibliography, illustration captions, or appendix material. Appendix material must be referenced in the text of the paper. Extensive supplemental materials are inappropriate. Use of appendices should be very limited and may include photographs, maps, charts, and/or graphs only.

NOTE: Oral history transcripts, correspondence between you and experts, questionnaires, and other primary or secondary materials used as sources for your paper should be cited in your bibliography but not included as attachments/appendices to your paper.

A2: Citations

• Citations—footnotes or endnotes are required.

• Citations are used to credit the sources of specific ideas as well as direct quotations.

• Refer to Part III, Rule 16, for citation styles. Please note that an extensively annotated footnote should not be used to get around the word limit.

A3: Preparation Requirements

• Essays must be printed on plain, white 8.5 x 11-inch paper with 1-inch margins on all sides.

• Pages must be numbered consecutively and double-spaced with writing on one side only, and in 12-point font.

• Essays, including a title page and annotated bibliography, must be uploaded and submitted to the VOCFlorida.org website by January 2, 2027.

• Winning essay papers will be published on the VOCFlorida.org website by contest officials; you must be prepared to give permission for such publication.

B. Exhibit

An exhibit is a visual representation of your research and interpretation of your topic's significance in history. The analysis and interpretation of your topic must be clear and evident to the viewer. Labels and captions should be used creatively with visual images and objects to enhance the message of your exhibit.

B1: Size Requirements

• The overall size of your exhibit when displayed for judging must be no larger than 40 inches wide, 30 inches deep, and 6 feet high.

• Measurement of the exhibit does not include the table on which it rests; however, it does include any stand that you create.

• Circular or rotating exhibits or those meant to be viewed from all sides must be no more than 30 inches in diameter. See Figure 4 (page 41) for illustration.

B2: Word Limit

• A 500-word limit applies to all student-composed text that appears on, or as part of, an exhibit entry.

• This includes the text that you write for titles, subtitles, captions, graphs, timelines, media devices, or supplemental materials (e.g., photo albums, scrapbooks, etc.) where you use your own words.

• Brief factual credits of the sources of illustrations or quotations included on the exhibit do not count toward the 500-word limit. A date (January 1, 1903) counts as one word. See Figure 5 (at end below, page 42) for additional explanation. NOTE: Be careful that your message is clear in the exhibit itself. Extensive supplemental material is inappropriate. Oral history transcripts, correspondence between you and experts, questionnaires, and other primary or secondary material used as sources for your exhibit should be cited in your bibliography but not included as attachments to your bibliography or exhibit.

B3: Media Devices

• Media devices (e.g., DVD players, tablets, mp3 players, video monitors, computers, etc.) used in an exhibit must not run for more than a total of three minutes.

• Quotes from another source (e.g., clip from a documentary, primary source music, etc.) are considered quotes. Any student-composed

questions, narration, or graphics incorporated within a media presentation are subject to the 500-word limit (Rule B2).

• Viewers and judges must be able to control media devices. Any media devices must fit within the size limits of the exhibit.

• Any media devices used should be integral to the exhibit—not a method to bypass the prohibition against live student involvement.

B4: Crediting Sources

• All quotes from written sources must be credited on the exhibit.

• All visual sources (e.g., photographs, paintings, charts, and graphs, etc.) must be credited on the exhibit and fully cited in the annotated bibliography.

• Brief, factual credits do not count toward the word total. See Figure 6 (at end below).

B5: Required Written Materials

• Six copies of your title page and bibliography should be presented to the judges for review. Be sure to bring an additional copy for your own reference.

Refer to Part III, Rules 15-16, for citation and style information.

Counting Words

Examples from an exhibit board on the number of student-composed words:

John Quincy Adams served as the Secretary of State….

Student-Composed Words: 9

These are all student-composed words.

--

On August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified….

Student-Composed Words: 7

The date counts as one word.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote that “All men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence...

Student-Composed Words: 10

Direct quotations from primary and secondary sources do not count as student-composed words.

“Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth…” Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863

Student-Composed Words: 0

Direct quotations from primary and secondary sources and brief, factual credits do not count as student-composed words.

Photos and video recordings of winning scholastic exhibits will be published on the VOCFlorida.org website by contest officials; you must be prepared to give permission for such publication.

C. Oratory Presentation (Speech)

An oratorical presentation is a spoken portrayal of your topic’s significance in history and must be an original production. It is essentially a two-for-one: a written essay that you deliver verbally. It should be scripted based on research of your chosen topic and should have somewhat more dramatic appeal than a dry essay by virtue of your

relating a significant historical or current events story, but not at the expense of the factual information itself. You may read from your script, if needed. Because a speech does not have footnotes or endnotes, you should state the sources of your information within your presentation, as well as providing them in your written bibliography.

C1 Time Requirements

• Oratorical presentations should last a minimum of eight minutes, and they may not exceed ten minutes in length. Timing starts at the beginning of the performance following the announcement of the title and student's name.

C2 Introduction

• The title of your entry and your name must be the first and only announcements prior to the start of the presentation.

C3 Script and PowerPoint

• The script for your oratory should be included with the written material presented to the judges before your speech, including your title page and bibliography. You may use PowerPoint slides with your oratory presentation if you wish; however, such slides are not mandatory, and be careful that they do not detract from your verbal presentation. You may read from your script as needed. If you go "off script" during your presentation that is perfectly acceptable for an oratory.

C4 Required Written Materials

• Present six copies of your title page, script and bibliography to the judges for review in advance of your presentation, keeping one for yourself. Refer to Part III, Rules 15-16, for citation and style information. After your oratory there may be a brief Q-and-A if the judges want to

clarify any points. They will use your written text afterwards to aid their recall as they score your presentation.

Recordings of winning oral presentations will be published on the VOCFlorida.org website by contest officials; you must be prepared to give permission to such publication.

V. How Will Your Entry Be Judged?

A. Benefits of The Evaluation Process

VOCFL's goal is to provide you with a high-quality, educational experience—whether or not you win a scholarship or other recognition. The judges' evaluations are part of the learning and skill-building process of VOCFL. The judges' evaluations will help you to improve your academic and presentation skills and will provide positive feedback for the hard work you have put into producing your project. The judges' comments also can provide you with ideas for revisions and enhancements, if you should choose to re-use this material for separate scholarship programs. Remember, regardless of the outcome, by participating in the VOCFL scholarship program, you will benefit from the experience. You will gain research, critical thinking, academic writing, and presentation skills that will last your entire life. You will become an expert on an important topic of interest to you and to others. You will learn to manage your time and acquire poise and self-confidence.

B. Who are the Judges?

Historians, educators, survivors of Communism, experienced veterans, and others interested in history and education serve as judges in the

VOCFL competition. The Contest Coordinators work very hard to ensure quality judging experience.

C. How Does the Evaluation Process Work?

At official VOCFL contests, each category usually is judged as a whole by a panel of judges. Time constraints due to the number of entries often require entries in some categories to be divided among several teams of judges. Finals then become necessary. In such cases, the entries judged best by each team of initial judges are re-evaluated by a new team of judges to determine the winning entries in the category. The number of entries in finals and procedures for judging vary by contest and category and are within the discretion of the contest officials.

D. Consensus Judging

Judges will not assign a numerical score to each entry; rather, they will rank the entries in their group. Judges are required to consult with each other in determining individual rankings. Judges are encouraged to review the results of their category to assure accuracy in the evaluation process.

E. The Subjective Nature of Judging

Judges must evaluate certain aspects of your entry that are objective (e.g., were primary sources used; is the written material grammatically correct and accurately spelled, etc.). But judges also must evaluate interpretive aspects of your entry that are qualitative in nature (e.g., analysis and conclusions about the historical data, etc.). Historians often reach different opinions about the significance of the same data. It is therefore crucial for you to base your interpretations and conclusions on solid research. Judges will check to determine whether you used available primary sources and whether you were careful to examine all sides of an

issue and present a balanced account of your research and presentation. Your annotated bibliography is critical to this process.

F. The Decision of the Judges is Final

You, your parents, and your teachers should realize that inadvertent inequities may occur in judging and that contest officials do want to be informed of any problems. If you have a concern, ask your coordinator about the correct process to follow in notifying officials. The decision of the judges is final.

G. Evaluation Criteria

i. Historical Quality (40%)

The most important aspects of your entry are its historical quality as well as your analysis of it, and how you relate that research and analysis to the VOCFL theme of differentiating Communist dictators' governance models from the United States' historical Constitutional governance model. This is the central focus of this scholarship program. As you do your research, you should ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on your historical analysis.

- Is my entry historically accurate?
- Does my entry provide analysis and interpretation of the historical data rather than just a description?
- Does my entry demonstrate an understanding of historical context?
- Does my annotated bibliography demonstrate wide research?

- Does my entry demonstrate a balanced presentation of materials, in both the United States' context and that of the Communist country and its leader(s) that I am comparing with U.S. historical governance?
- Does my entry demonstrate use of available primary sources?

ii. Relation to Theme (40%)

Your entry must explain clearly the relation of your topic to the **VOCFL theme** of telling the story of Communist rule and its victims in a specific time and place, and comparing that governance model to that of the United States, either then, or as a rule. You should ask yourself the following questions to help focus your topic on the theme and its significance.

- How does my topic (Communist leader) relate to the theme?
- Why is my topic important?
- How is my topic significant in history and in relation to the VOCFL theme?
- How did my topic influence history? Was his rule in fact a turning point in history? Was the writing of the U.S. Constitution a turning point in history? What are their respective legacies?
- How did the events and atmosphere (social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of my topic's time period) influence my topic in history?

iii. Clarity of Presentation (20%)

Although historical quality is most important, your entry must be presented in an effective manner. You should ask yourself the following questions to help you focus on your presentation.

- Is my entry original, creative, imaginative, and meaningful in subject and presentation?
- Is my written material clear, grammatically correct, and accurately spelled?
- Is my entry well-organized?
- Do I display stage presence in my oratory presentation, i.e., do I display command of my material?
- Is my visual material presented clearly, and does it make an impact?

H. Rule Compliance

Rule infractions occur when you violate any of the rules stated in this Contest Handbook. Infractions are not grounds for disqualification, but judges will take any rule infractions into consideration in their final rankings. Failure to comply with the rules will count against your entry. A project may be <u>disqualified</u> from the contest on three grounds:

1. Plagiarizing all or part of the VOCFL project, or any inappropriate use of Artificial Intelligence in your final product. (Ask yourself: Is the analysis of the issue I'm describing my own? Are the conclusions drawn about what this issue means historically, politically, etc., my own? If not, re-address the analysis and conclusions until they are your own.) Please note that

failing to give proper credit is plagiarism. Inappropriate use of AI is both intellectual laziness and potential grounds for disqualification.

2. Reusing a project (or research from a project from a previous year or entering a project in multiple VOCFL entry categories within a contest year).

3. Tampering with any part of the project of another student.

Judges' Criteria – Sample Judges' Evaluations

1. On the next two pages you will see the Judges' actual tabulation sheets. The first one is the criteria review for assessing the historical quality, clarity and creativity, and relationship to the VOCFL theme of your research project; the second one is the analysis points review.

Fig 2: Victims of Communism Florida Student Eval

Student: _____ Date ____/____/____

Category: _____

Judge: _____

Judging Criteria	Evaluation			Comments (Strengths, areas for improvement)
	-	Ave	+	
Historical Quality (40%)				
Entry is Historically Accurate				
Address Analysis Points (see AP Score Card)				
Places Topic in Historical context				
Shows wide primary sources				
Uses available primary sources				
Clarity of Presentation (20%)				
Project, written / oral material is original, clear, appropriate, organized, articulate				
Project is organized, has visual impact, correctly uses maps, photos, etc.				
Relationship to the Theme (40%)				
Clearly relates topic to theme				
Demonstrates significance of topic in history and draws conclusions				
Rules Compliance				
Maintains size requirement (40x30x72)				
Includes annotated bibliography				
Media device maintains time limit (3 mins.)				
Maintains word limit (500 words - exhibit)				
(2,000 – 3,000 words – essay; 8-10 mins – speech)				

Overall Rating (Circle One)

Superior Excellent Good

Fig 3 :Evaluation Sheet: Victims of Communism Florida AP **Date:**

Student:
Category:
Judge:

	Evaluation			
Judging Criteria	-	> Avg	+	Comments
Analysis Point 1				
1. How the Communist leader you've chosen shaped his countrys' political, economic, educational, judicial, and social systems to reflect his personal ideology and how that affected ordinary citizens. - Identify how authoritarian regimes victimize their citizens by: - Restricting individual rights and choices, ... - Suppressing freedom of speech and religion - How Communism impact the principles of: 1. Democracy, one person one vote 2. Due Process of Law, Rule of Law 3. Federalism 4. Individual freedoms and rights, including private ownership of property and businesses 5. Limited Government 6. Republicanism (representative government, consent of governed) 7. Separation of powers (i.e. checks and balances)				
Analysis Point 2				
2. Compare how your selected Communist leader's government exercised power and treated its citizens against the principles and practices of the U.S.				

Overall Rating (Circle One)
Superior. Excellent. Good.

VI: Other

A. Contacts: Victims of Communism-Florida

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National Website: https://www.victimsofcommunism.org

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VOC-Florida would like to thank the National History Day/Manatee History Day program for allowing us to borrow from and adapt their Rule Book for our use in creating our VOCFL Student Handbook.

NHD Rule Book May be duplicated without permission of National History Day; however, duplication for profit is prohibited.

Figure 4: Exhibit Size

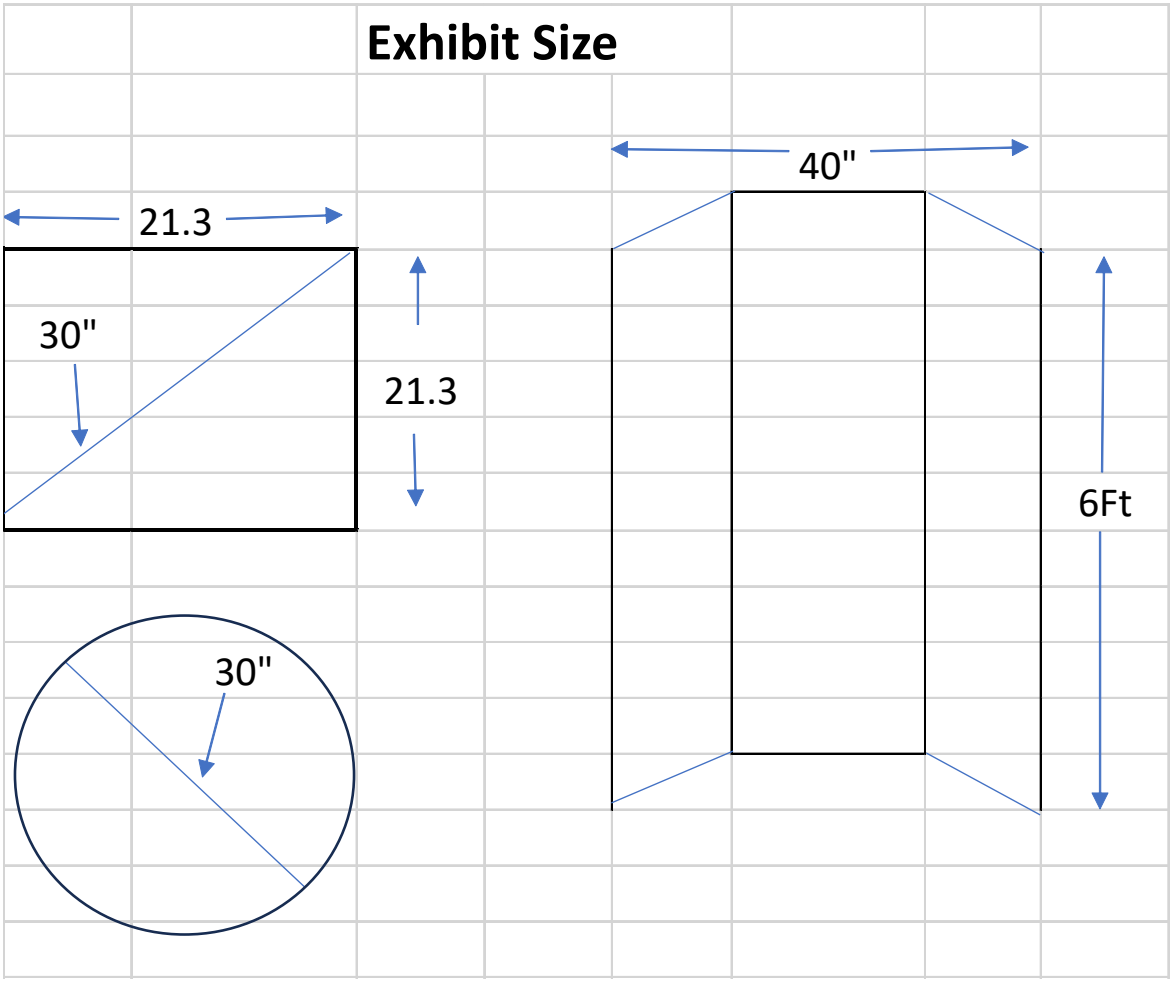

Figure 5 - Word Count

Example from Exhibit Board	umber of Word	Explanation
John Quincy Adams served as the Secetary of State ...	9	These are all student-composed Words
On August 18, 1920 the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified....	7	The date counts as one word
When Thomas Jefferson wrote that "All men are created equal" in the Declaration of ...	10	Direct quotations from primary and secondary sources
Four Score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth.." Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg	0	Direct quotations from primary and secondary sources