



## Judging: Tips to Prepare for Your Science Fair

- Preparing for **Science Fair Judging**—Practice Makes Perfect!
  - If you can communicate your science fair project well, you maximize your chances of winning.
  - Write up a short "speech" (about 2–5 minutes long) summarizing your science fair project. You will give this speech when you first meet the judges. (Remember to talk about the theory behind your science fair project-why your project turns out the way it does.)
  - Organize a list of questions you think the judges will ask you and prepare/practice answers for them. Practice explaining your science fair project to others and pretend they are judges.
  - Practice explaining your science fair project in simple terms so anyone can understand it.
  
- Presenting During the Science Fair Judging Period—Be Professional!
  - Always dress nicely for the science fair judging period-NO JEANS!
  - Make good use of your display board. Point to diagrams and graphs when you are discussing them.
  - Always be positive and enthusiastic!
  - Be confident with your answers; do not mumble.
  - If you have no idea what the judge is asking, or do not know the answer to their question, it is okay to say "I do not know."
  - Treat each person who visits you like a judge, even nonscientists.
  - *After* the science fair, always ask for feedback from the judges to improve your project.

## From a Judge's Perspective: Tips for a Successful Scientific Interview

No two judges will approach your science project from the same perspective. They come from different personal and professional backgrounds, they might or might not have judged at this type of competition before, and they might be more or less informed about your topic. Having said that, all of the judges will be trying to determine the same general thing: your ability to independently conduct and communicate original, meaningful science or engineering research. Table 1 lists the seven factors judges usually use to make their judging decisions. The weight awarded to each factor varies depending on both the specific science competition and on the individual judge.

Factors judges use to make decisions	What the judges are trying to determine	Examples of questions a judge might ask during an interview
Creativity / originality	Is this work novel?	Why did you choose this topic and how did you settle on your approach to the problem?
Scientific thought / engineering process	Did the student understand the scientific/engineering method and apply it appropriately?	Can you walk me through how and why you decided on this experimental/engineering design?
Background information / thoroughness	Does the student understand what was done previously in the field?	How does your approach to the question differ from people's previous approaches?
Skill / independence	Who designed and carried out the bulk of the work?	What was the most surprising experimental/engineering challenge you faced during this science project? How did you overcome it?

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Thoroughness	Is the completed work sufficient to move the field forward?	What were your goals with this science project and how would you evaluate where you are in respect to those goals?
Clarity	Can the student clearly and easily discuss all aspects of his or her project? During an interview, judges might want to make sure that a student can think and speak well when thrown a curve.	If your tests had shown XYZ instead, what would you have done? Why?
Teamwork (only applicable for team projects)	Was each member of the team fully involved? Does each member, regardless of his or her specific experimental role, understand all aspects of the science project?	The great thing about working together is the synergy between people. What would you say was the most important skill or idea each of you had during the course of this science project?

## The Do's and Don'ts of Judging Interviews

Exactly what happens during judging varies from competition to competition. You should carefully review the procedures outlined on the website of the competition(s) you're entering. However, most of the top competitions rely on face-to-face judging interviews in order to make the final determinations. These interviews usually have a time cap. You might have less than 15 minutes to convey all of the information you want during an interview. In addition to explaining all the science, you'll want to leave judges with the impression that you were courteous, confident, comfortable, knowledgeable, enthusiastic, and engaging. Here are some tips for doing just that:

- **Make sure your display board (if it's allowed in the competition) conveys information efficiently.** Depending on how the fair is set up, and on judges' individual schedules, judges might or might not have had time to preview the displays. Regardless, the point of the board is to convey as much information as quickly as possible. A well-put-together display board is an advantage, allowing you to get the basic description of your science project across quickly so that the judges can focus on asking you questions to evaluate what you did and how much you know.
- **Get started immediately.** Introduce yourself and ask the judge whether he or she would like you to start describing your work. If he or she says yes, provide a good overview of your project, but be prepared to stop and answer questions at any time.
- **Don't ignore a question.** If you're in the middle of a speech and a judge asks you a question, immediately switch to trying to answer it. Interviews are time-limited and the judge is trying to ascertain, within those time constraints, whether or not you meet all seven of the aforementioned judging criteria.
- **Practice what you have to say about your science project.** It is *very* important to relay information confidently and succinctly, but remember that a judge wants more than just a canned speech. If a judge asks you a question, he or she wants you to abandon your prepared speech and have an intelligent (but concise) discussion. If you get too flustered when you're forced to deviate from your practiced project explanation, the judges will wonder if you truly understand what you're saying or if you're just repeating someone else's explanations. So, practice an explanation of your science project, *and* practice being interrupted to answer questions.
- **Practice your tone.** Every interview should have a professional but conversational tone.
- **Don't let silence reign.** If a judge appears to be out of questions, then you should keep the conversation going and create opportunities to convey how much you know about your science project. Some things you can do include: pointing out and explaining surprising data points, talking about what you'd do next with your data, discussing the wider implications of your research.
- **Talk about the process and not just the product.** For a judge to evaluate your thought process and logic, it is important for him or her to understand not only your results, but also how you got there. Describe how and why you arrived at that particular experimental setup or product design. If preliminary data encouraged you to re-design your science project, explain how that evolved.