



Science Fair Judging

By Amber Hess

For some science fairs you will actually have a chance to meet and speak with the judges. If you prepare for these interviews, they're a great opportunity to create a positive impression of your work.

Key Info

- 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 Yourself 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!
 - Practice explaining your science fair project in simple terms so anyone can understand it.
 - 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 his or her 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.

The Details

Preparing for the 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. Do not restate your abstract word by word. You will give this speech (from memory) when you first meet the judges. Include in the speech:
 - How you got the idea.
 - How you did the experiment (explain any relevant terms along the way).
 - Your results and conclusions.
 - Why your science fair project is important in today's society (how will it help people today?). You don't have to cure cancer. Perhaps your work will help a small group of people, but it's still important.
 - Demonstrate that you understand the theory behind why your project turns out the way it does.
 - If you can't fit all of this into your presentation, be prepared to discuss each of the above topics separately.
 - Expect to be interrupted when you talk to the judges. You will rarely finish your speech.
- Organize a list of questions you think the judges will ask you and prepare/practice answers for them. A few common questions are listed below.
 - How much help did you receive from others?
 - What does your data tell you?
 - Why is this research important? (Who cares if a rocket flies well?)
 - What do your graphs represent?
 - What does your data tell you?
 - What problems did you run into while doing your experiment and how did you fix them?
 - Name the three most interesting things you learned when doing this science fair project?
 - What further research do you plan on doing, or would do, to this science fair project? (Your future study)
- Study your background research as you would for a test. In some ways, presenting your science fair project is like taking an exam. The better you know your background research, the higher the chance you have of winning.
 - This is the part I usually had trouble with: I would do the research and understand everything, but then I needed to study it. I would eventually learn and remember all the facts I should know, but I had to sit myself down and study. Force yourself to pretend there is a test the next day on all of the information, and you will be prepared.
- Practice explaining your science fair project to others and pretend they are judges.
 - Practice explaining all graphs, tables, your short speech, answers to possible questions judges might ask, etc.
 - Practice explaining the theory behind your science fair project. Theory includes everything from your background research.
 - Videotaping yourself during practice can also be very helpful. Although it can be painful to watch the video, you will see the mistakes you made and be able to fix them the next time you speak.
- Practice explaining your science fair project in simple terms so anyone can understand it.
 - Many students do not know how to explain their science fair project to the general public. If you can explain your project in laymen's terms, you are one step ahead of everyone else!

Presenting Yourself— Be Professional!

- Always dress up nicely for the science fair judging period-NO JEANS! Everyone will take you more seriously if you look professional.
- Make good use of your display board. Point to diagrams and graphs when you are discussing them.
- Always be positive and enthusiastic!
 - Show the judges you are interested in your research and they will be more likely to remember you.
 - Do not be negative unless you are emphasizing a frustrating problem you ran into.
- Be confident with your answers. Do not mumble and say "Ummmmm...I think maybe this is happening?" Even if you answer a question incorrectly, at least they will not think you are a wimp!
- Emphasize how you were creative/unique/innovative with your science fair project.
 - One of the major criteria on a judges' list is creativity and originality.
- 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."
 - This is better than making something up that probably is not correct.
 - It's better to get on to the next question for which you probably do know the answer.
- Treat each person who visits you like a judge, even nonscientists.
 - They may be a valuable contact who could give you an internship later on.
- Always ask for feedback from the judges after the science fair. Gather your judges' email addresses and ask them how you can improve. (If you know their name and employer, often you can do an Internet search to obtain their email addresses.) In my experience, I hear back from about half of the science fair judges I email. If you move onto the next level, you should update your science fair project and/or display board after receiving feedback. The improvements you make could determine whether you place in the next science fair! If you don't go on to the next level, their comments can help you on your next science fair project.