

WHAT JUDGES LOOK FOR

In general, judges evaluate the following aspects of a science project: creative ability, scientific thought, thoroughness, skill, and clarity. Creativity and the use of the scientific method are the two most important aspects of a science project in the eyes of a judge. What is of primary importance is how much the student has learned about the subject of the research and how well the student can converse on that subject.

In judging the creativity of a project, a judge tries to determine whether the idea for the project is original or clever considering the grade level of the participant. What is original or clever for a first grader is obviously not very original or clever for a high school student. The judge also tries to determine how much of the project was done by the student. It is expected that students receive guidance from parents, teachers, or other professionals; however, the actual work done on the project should be completed by the students alone.

In judging scientific thought, judges look to see if there has been an *identification of a problem* (*is a question asked?*). The judge then looks for a *hypothesis* (*an educated guess to the problem*). Then the *experimentation* is evaluated along with the *analysis of the data* collected. Lastly, the judge considers the appropriateness of the *conclusion* reached from the data collected.

In making their final evaluations, judges try to determine the thoroughness of the research, again keeping in mind the age of the participant. The time that was spent on the project and the amount of related information known about the subject are determined from the student interview.

Next, the skill of the student is evaluated. The appropriateness of the project for the age and skill level of the student is judged. If technical equipment is used in the project, the student should be able to explain the purpose and the manipulation of the equipment.

Lastly, the clarity of the presentation of the project is evaluated. The judge looks at the quality of the display and the extent to which the student did the work in setting up the display. Notebooks and posters are critiqued for how well the data, results, and conclusions are presented.

Judges are impressed with students, no matter what their age, who can speak freely and confidently about their project. A thoroughly done, well understood project done on a simple concept is more impressive than a complex project that was thrown together at the last minute.