

Judging Tips

- As a general rule, judges represent professional authority to exhibitors. For this reason, judges should first be active listeners, and should use an encouraging tone. Judges should use questions to lead the student to self-discovery. A judge might ask a student to postulate additional uses for his or her project beyond the uses posed in the presentation. Since our interest and objective is to have these students continue pursuing the sciences and engineering, please be encouraging, thoughtful, sensitive and kind. Judges should always give credit to the student for completing a challenging task, and/or for success in previous competitions.
- Judges should examine the quality of the student's work, and how well he or she understands the project and area of study. The physical display is secondary to the student's knowledge of the subject. Judges should look for evidence of laboratory, field or theoretical work, not just library research or gadgeteering.
- Judges should keep in mind that competing in a science fair is not only a competition, but an educational and motivating experience for the students. The high point of the fair experience for most of the students is their judging interviews.
- Students may have worked on a research project for more than one year. However, for the purpose of judging, only research conducted within the current year is to be evaluated. Although previous work is important, it should not unduly impact the judging of the current year's project.
- Judges should compare projects only with those competing at this fair and not with projects seen in other competitions or scholastic events.
- Judges need to evaluate the project to determine how much guidance was provided to the student in the design and implementation of his or her research. Especially when the student's research was conducted in an industrial or institutional setting, the student should have documentation that indicates the level of involvement by his or her mentor or supervisor in the overall project. Projects in which a high level of individual effort is evident should be given more weight than projects in which the student was heavily guided in project design, scope, conduct, and/or conclusions.
- When time is at a premium due to the number of projects that you need to evaluate, a Naval Science Awards judge must balance the competing priorities of being fair to all fair participants and evaluating any single project competently. Judges may need to use their experience to arrive at a subset of projects that they believe warrant detailed evaluations.
- Judges are encouraged to consult with Category Judges assigned by the Science Fair to resolve questions that they may have after evaluating a project or to compare two projects competing for an award that appear to be too close to allow

your own differentiation. While you must be conscious not to interfere in the work of a fair judge, a brief question of one expert in his or her field may help you to reach a decision.

Note: These judging tips were modified after reviewing those published as Intel ISEF-Affiliated Fair Judging Criteria by Science Service, 1719 N Street, NW, Washington DC 20036, 202-785-2255, a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, with the mission of advancing public understanding and appreciation of science.