



# GUIDE FOR JUDGES

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## STEM WIZARD SCIENCE FAIR REFERENCE

When judging a student science fair, it's important to keep in mind that they are a learning experience for the students. When you are in the important role of being a judge and providing feedback, remember that you are speaking with kids and **try to communicate in an age-appropriate and constructive manner.**

Be gentle with your questions and comments while still offering the **constructive criticism they need to improve upon their science projects.** It's easier to take a more direct approach with trained, professional adults, but these are impressionable students still building their science fair skills.

You will likely see projects in various stages of sophistication and degrees of polish. **It may take some effort to determine the degree at which the project was the result of the student's work** and what portions may have been performed by others who assisted the student with their project. Often students seek out assistance from parents, professors, etc. and it is a part of the judging role to figure out what percentage the student had done by themselves.

It is important to show genuine interest for all student projects you are assigned to judge. Not every project is destined to win, but that doesn't mean that the student didn't work hard on the research and creation of the presentation. **Honor their work by engaging with them** and asking thoughtful questions.

As a judge, you may be tempted to assist or correct the student by telling them directly what they have done right or wrong, but this is not always the best approach to take. It's important to **guide them through carefully-chosen questions** so that the student can "own" the discovery of the point you want to impart to them.

When students make a good point or impress you with a knowledgeable response to your questions, let them know. If you can, **be specific about what you are commending them on**; a generic "Great job" is less meaningful than saying, "Good work; your presentation delivery was professional and logical." Just because you give a compliment doesn't mean that the student will then expect to win, but they will remember that compliment and be encouraged by the positive interaction.

## SOME COMMON QUESTIONS THAT JUDGES ASK

- » What types of **background research** did you do to lead up to your project?
- » **What did you learn** in the course of working on the project?
- » Did any part of your **experience surprise you**/any surprising results?
- » What **tools/materials/equipment** did you use in the course of creating the project?
- » What **software** did you use throughout the process?
- » How did you learn to do ..... ?
- » Can you tell me **how you collaborated** with your teacher/mentor/team?
- » If you were to continue with this line of research, **what would you want to do next?**

## WHEN PICKING THE BEST FROM THE REST

- » Consider both the **quality and the quantity** of the work.
- » A more simple project over which the student demonstrates a **solid understanding of the scientific process and tools and techniques applied may often be preferred** over a more complex project that the student doesn't fully understand.
- » Remember that a student who can communicate effectively and interact knowingly with you (not scripted) likely has a **deeper understanding of the project** than a student who provides "stock" answers.
- » It is important that you are **consistent in your scoring criteria** so that you can more effectively compare projects after the allotted time for judging the projects is complete.