The Winning Science Fair Project

You can improve your chances of making a winning science fair project. There are many easy things you can do to give yourself a better chance of winning at a science fair or any science project competition.

The information provided will arm you with knowledge from people who actually won at top competitions. There are no systems to guarantee victory, but you can give yourself a competitive advantage.

Some winning tips are:

- Be Interested
- Pick a Challenging Topic
- Unique Projects Have an Edge
- Problems Encountered are War Stories
- Avoid “I’m not sure, but it might be...?”
- Include a “For next time...” Section
- Striking but Not Abrasive
- Follow the Rules – Even the Subtle Ones

You can read through these in any order depending on what you are most interested in working on next. If you follow all of this advice, you are sure to have an edge in your upcoming fair.

Be Interested

The surest footing you can get when embarking upon your quest to making a winning science fair project is to be interested in your subject matter. This one thing affects every single aspect of your project and your future presentation of your project.

Your interest and enthusiasm (or lack thereof) will direct your decisions and motivations. A keen interest in your project will allow you to be able to work on it longer, with more energy, and have more fun with it – and all of this will show through in every aspect of your research and work. Being interested in your work is good advice no matter what, but it’s especially important if you want a winning science fair project.

So, first and foremost, pick your topic well. Pick something that you have a profound interest in. If you don’t know what that could be, or are having trouble getting motivated, allow us to help – we have designed a process to help you.

Pick a Challenging Topic

This is good advice whether or not you are competing to win. If you are competing to win, this is critical. Choosing an overly simple topic will not help you make a winning science fair project.

Depending on what your level is (elementary, middle, high school or beyond) you may choose to extend a project from a list of choices given to you or you may need to come up with something entirely on
your own. In either case, there is a simple formula to determine what you need to do in order to make your project a ‘challenging’ topic. Take a look what others in your grade category have done in the past – if you look closely enough, you’ll notice a few outstanding examples where the competitor in question took a few extra steps in order to place his or her project above and beyond the others.

A great way to do this is to compete at one (or more) levels above the one you are in. If you are in middle school, then check out what the high school participants are doing for their projects and then make a project that could compete with this higher level. This will give you easy criteria at how challenging you should make your project, and if you do this it will give you an edge at making a winning science fair project.

**Unique Projects Have an Edge**

Unique maybe a little strong – but there is no denying the fact that projects that have some originality to them are more likely to be winning science fair projects than those that are based upon “tried and true” (and boring!) projects of the past. Take a look at prior projects at your school or online and you will quickly get an idea for what projects have been done to death. Different light color affecting plant growth comes to mind, and there are many others.

Choosing something unusual and atypical often times goes hand and hand with picking a challenging and interesting topic! So if you have something interesting in mind, you can probably come up with an aspect of your interest to turn into a unique winning science fair project.

**Problems Encountered are War Stories**

Judges at science fairs are scientists (at least at heart) and as such they love to hear about difficult, daunting, unforeseen problems that were overcome with persistence and the stubborn application of the scientific method. This is part of a good science fair project and what judges look for. If you run into hard problems, write the experience down. Even if you can’t solve it directly but instead have to go around it. This is what the evolution of science is all about – men and women that stubbornly refused to let difficult problems get in the way of their research and progress.

When you are done with your project, make sure to organize all of your “problem experiences” and then memorize one or two and practice reciting them as a stories. Most judges will identify with you because they themselves have no doubt run into troublesome challenges themselves and love hearing about how other people dealt with them. This will lend you credibility as a true scientist and the judge will most likely leave you feeling inspired by your story. Your efforts will get you one step closer to having a winning science fair project.

**Avoid “I’m not sure, but it might be...?”**

If during an interview with a judge you are asked a question for which you do not know the answer: do not pretend to know. Don’t even try – most judges will see right through this kind of deception and it will reflect very badly on you no matter how good the rest of your presentation and project is. Making a winning science fair project means, sometimes, having to say “I don’t know that,” especially if you have done work in a challenging field. It’s not the end of the world, and the judge will appreciate your honesty.
At the highest levels of competition, it’s very unlikely that you will come away from a science fair having been able to answer every single question posed to you about your project. The world of science is big – no one expects you to know it all, just be sure to be dutiful in your research and get to the point where you feel comfortable about your subject. If you can do that, you will be in good shape to answer questions at the fair, and you will be one step closer to a winning science fair project.

**Include a “For next time...” Section**

At the end of your science project report, include a section that describes what you would differently if you had the opportunity to do it again. This shows thoughtfulness and thoroughness on your part – again, both traits common in a true scientist.

A great way to accomplish this is to keep a journal with all of your thoughts and ideas about your project. This will allow you to jot down any ideas you may have about your project in a spot where they will not get lost. This also allows you to form the “for next time” section quite easily by simply lifting the (good) ideas you had about your project, but were unable to do this time around for whatever reason. It took effort to come up with those ideas – use them to your advantage!

**Striking but Not Abrasive**

In addition to doing a good job at your science report and display you will want to align yourself with winning science fair projects everywhere by designing the visual appearance of your project to be attention getting, perhaps even striking – but without being abrasive.

If you are thinking of using twenty different neon colors in order to decorate your display, you may want to think again. A great and award winning science fair project stands upon a foundation of science not flash, in order to win. If you feel the need to constant tinker with the visual appearance of you project, perhaps you are trying to conceal a perceived lack in another aspect of the project.

Make sure the fundamentals of you project (the topic, the science, the research, the experiment) are sound and they will stand on their own. Are we saying to make your display as bland as possible? Of course not! Use colored construction paper as backing for your paper displays, use a creating display approach – by all means have some fun with it. But don’t go overboard. Winning science fair projects win with fundamentals, not flash.

**Follow the Rules – Even the Subtle Ones**

Make sure to follow every rule set forth by the competition you are entering; including the rules that are hinted at. What do we mean by this? Sometimes, you can get a sample judging sheet before the event or from last years’ event. Often times, you can glean valuable information about what the judges deem to be the more important aspects of a winning science fair project.

Sometimes judging will reward some aspects of a project more than others. Some fairs favor originality above everything this, some rigor, and others for applicability. **Do not** try to get an unfair advantage by getting anything private (not publicly accessible.) Such actions can only lead to your doom in one form or another. **Do** learn from every piece of public information about the fair you are attending.
Knowing who your judges are and what they want and then meeting these expectations is a great way to get a fair advantage by doing work that others are often not willing to do. There are certain things that are almost universal in judging criteria, so be sure to review these as well.

Use every *fair and even handed advantage* to get your project closer to being a winning science fair project.

Need more information? Google books allows a glimpse at some excellent books on make a *winning science fair project.*