



CES Science Fair 2010



JUDGES' BRIEFING

Dear Judges,

Welcome to the Calvary Episcopal School Science Fair-2010! Though you may not realize it, you are about to have a profound effect upon many young lives. There will be tension, nervousness, and nothing less than High Drama for these students...and it's all due to YOU! Not being their teachers or parents, your outside presence has raised the stakes by 3 notches in their very impressionable minds.

It's going to be a long, hard day's work, but it's going to be an experience that they'll always remember. So, let's roll-up our sleeves and give it to them!

Time:

Time is going to be critical. With more than 120 student projects and 8 Judges in 2-Judge teams, you will only be able to spend 4-5 minutes per project (maximum), if we are to finish main judging by 12:00 PM and begin Final Judging. You may be a bit slower at first, but things will greatly speed up after a brief learning curve and establishing a more solidified mental benchmark.

Support:

We will provide you snacks, drinks and lunch as you need. If you have ANY need whatsoever, please approach the Fair Director (David Haven), or the Middle School Science Teacher (Ashley Smith). At least one of them will be present and will take care of any need you may have as promptly as possible.

Marking:

Judges shall fill out all Judging Forms in BLUE ink, with pens provided by the Fair Director.

Range of Scoring:

Most scores should be centered around "3." A score of "3" is Satisfactory and reflective of meeting expectations.

When judging children, we all have a propensity to give high scores for their efforts. But, when we come to a project that really stands out...one that makes you say "This is better than most," or even "Wow," Judges find themselves in a position where they can't give a score high enough to set an exemplary project sufficiently above the others.

When this happens, Judges are forced to go back to previous projects to lower those scores, which takes valuable time, and makes the scoring more arbitrary. Basically, think of 4's and 5's as:

4 = "This is better than most"

5 = "WOW!"

If an expectation is not satisfactorily met, then a Score between 0 and 2 should be considered.

At the end of this briefing packet is a flowchart that you may find helpful, especially during early stages of Judging.

Recommendation

It is advisable to practice scoring 5 projects. Go through the complete judging process for 5 projects and record results on Judging Forms. These practice forms will be destroyed, so clearly mark them as "PRACTICE" and give to the Fair Director or School Director for destruction whenever you deem appropriate.

This practice will help you through the learning curve and provide a point of reference from which to judge all other projects. However, don't forget to Re-Judge the first 5 projects after all others are judged. Trust me, it's easy to do.

Compartmentalization:

To maintain an auditable structure as well as the highest degree of institutional probity, Judges should only communicate with Judging Assistants, the Fair Director, and the School Director.

There may be circumstances in which the Recording Official may need to consult with Judges; this is allowed when initiated by the Recording Official.

Judges should refrain from conversing with the Runner, and there should be absolutely NO contact with any Totalling Official (who should not be in the Judging area anyway).

Project Code:

Upon completion of this briefing, Judges shall privately meet as a group, and develop a Project Code Convention. This Convention shall be written down on a sheet of paper, sealed in an envelope, signed across the seal by the Head Judge, and delivered to the Recording Official. The Project Code shall be known only to the Judges and the Recording Official: no others...not even the Fair Director nor School Director.

The Code should:

- be simple; and,
- consist of 3 or 4 letters; and,
- reflect the Title of each project.

An example of such a convention may be the 1st two letters of the 1st word of the project, followed by the 1st two letters of the last word in the title.

For instance, a project entitled:

"How a Lever Works"

...would have "HOWO" as the Project Code.

Question: Why have such a convention?

Answer 1: Having the full Project Title on the Judging Form could compromise the Fair's integrity. This is a very important event to many people, and emotions can run high. We must be objective and have a solid structure in place that not only ensures objectivity and fairness, but an unchallengeable perception of objectivity and fairness as well. Having a code *en lieu* of the title on the Judging Form, protects the Totaling Official and other intermediaries from any allegation, or even perception, of impropriety.

Answer 2: We are human. Mistakes happen. A number may be accidentally transposed, or there may be an error on the Master Roster that we're not yet aware of. With a Code reflecting the Title, there exists a cross-reference mechanism, as well as the ability to conduct an audit in the event of a challenge. (Spot audits will be conducted for quality control purposes).

Just PLEASE remember, KEEP IT SIMPLE and QUICK TO DECODE!!!

Parental Assistance / Contract:

All parents received and acknowledged a Contract regarding the limitations of their role in assisting their children. This was spelled out very clearly in the attached "Parent Contract."

Basically, we are looking for independent work and learning. Some examples are provided in the Contract.

Please review the Contract at this time. While you may find it difficult to penalize a project for the actions of parents, it is a standard that must be enforced to ensure a level playing field. However, the trick is to discern the difference between excessive parental assistance, and learning advanced knowledge, concepts and materials.

The "Presentation" aspect of the project (as described in the Parent Contract) is going to be primary indicator of excessive parental involvement. Other "advanced" aspects —*exempli gratia* content, methods, tools, measurement practices, *et cetera*—alone should not.

Keep in mind that there are some sharp kids, many with parents who have a lot to offer.

For example, let us say that a child's parent is an Air Conditioning Installation Technician, and the project is about air-flow in different shapes/types of air ducts. On the surface, it appears that this is a prime example of excessive parental involvement; NOT NECESSARILY SO. To the contrary, this could be a candidate for an outstanding project.

The topic may have been suggested by the parent (which is fine) but due to the child's exposure, he/she may have had an interest due his past exposure to the parent's profession (which is even better). Promoting inter-generational learning is encouraged and provides the child an opportunity to interact with elders, to gain knowledge not available in the classroom, as well as foster a Scientific/Engineering interest in a particular profession.

The fact that this student may have used an air-velocity gauge in his experiment is also OK...he learned how to use a tool as well.

The key word is "learning" within the context of the Scientific Method. Now, how do we discern between excessive parental involvement and an outstanding project? Again, look at the presentation.

Does it look like professionally produced by the marketing department of a stock market brokerage firm, or by a child? You will also be able to gauge by the content and presentation of the report...is it an Engineering report, or the legitimate product of a sharp 8th grader?

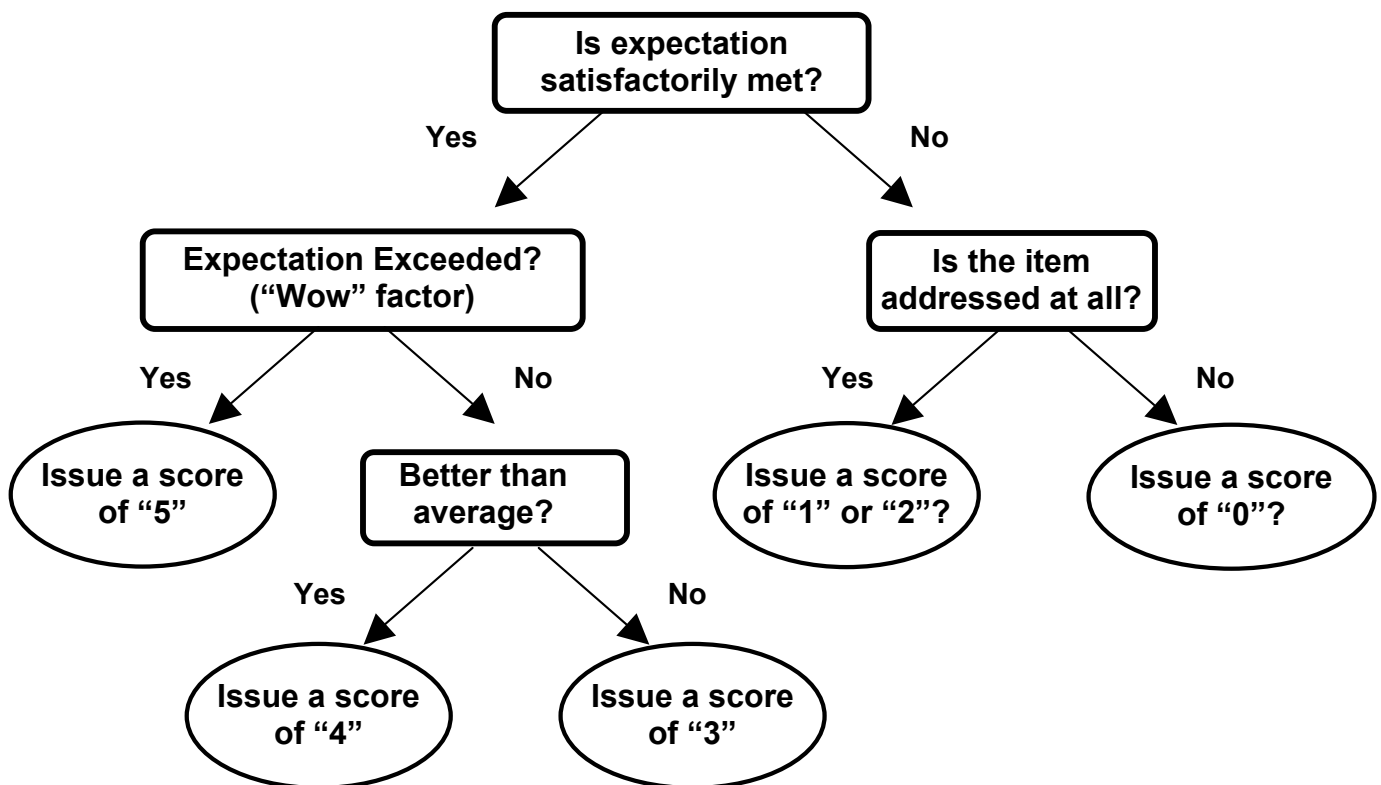
The Oral Interview will tell the tale. It will be obvious. Just be sure that you can objectively quantify a definable reason.

Closing:

That should hopefully do it. There's no such thing as a silly question, so feel free to ask anything. Thank you for your professional presence...LET'S ROLL!

D. David Haven Jr.
Science Fair Director

Scoring Flowchart



Notes: