How long does a science fair project take? A plan by days

Peabody blog · Science · updated 2026-11-05

Most science fair projects take five days to do comfortably and can be squeezed into a weekend; growing projects need two to four weeks. A day-by-day plan for each.

A science fair project that tests in one sitting takes about five days to do comfortably, one job a day, and can be squeezed into a weekend if it has to be; a project where something has to grow takes the testing days plus about three more, which is two to four weeks. The testing is rarely what eats the time. Getting things together, writing it up and making the board take three days on their own, whatever the project.

I built a countdown and a plan by days into Peabody's science fair pages: keep a project, put in the fair date, and the plan lays its jobs out over the days you have left. Here's how that plan works, and what fits a weekend, a week or two weeks.

The five jobs every project has

Every Peabody project, short or long, has the same five jobs in the same order:

1. Gather what you need and print your sheets.
2. Test: the first try at every level.
3. Repeat until every level has its tries (three at least).
4. Write: find the middle numbers, draw the graph, write the conclusion.
5. Make the board.

With time to spare, each job gets its own day: gather on day one, the first test on day two, the repeats across the project's testing days, then the writing, then the board on the day before the fair. With less time, the plan squeezes the jobs into the days there are, keeping the order and dropping nothing.

How many days, by kind of project

- Kind of project: One sitting · Testing: 1 day · Comfortable plan: 5 days · Example: Does a steeper ramp make a toy car go farther?: 45 minutes a sitting
- Kind of project: Settles or dries overnight · Testing: 2 days · Comfortable plan: 5 days · Example: Does a pinecone close when it gets wet?
- Kind of project: A few days · Testing: 3 to 5 days · Comfortable plan: 6 to 8 days · Example: Which grows crystals faster: salt or sugar?: 5 days
- Kind of project: Sprouting · Testing: 7 days · Comfortable plan: 10 days · Example: Do soaked beans sprout faster?

- Kind of project: Growing · Testing: 10 to 14 days · Comfortable plan: 13 to 17 days · Example: Does planting a seed deeper make it slower to come up?: 14 days
- Kind of project: The longest · Testing: three weeks · Comfortable plan: about 24 days · Example: Which kitchen scrap helps a plant grow most?: measured on day 21

Peabody marks a plan as tight when the testing days plus three are more than the days left. A 14-day growing project with ten days to go is tight; pick a shorter one.

What fits a weekend, a week or two weeks

Of Peabody's 115 projects, 91 test in two days or less, 102 in a week or less, and 13 take longer than a week. Each time has its own page:

- One weekend. Saturday morning: gather and print the sheets. Saturday afternoon: the test, three tries at every level. Sunday: the means, the graph, the conclusion and the board. Only projects that test in a day or two are on it, because anything that has to grow, dry or crystallise needs days a weekend doesn't have.
- One week. Every one-day project, plus the ones that take a few days to dry, settle or sprout. With a one-day project and a week, do the three tries on three different days: if the ice melts in ten minutes on Monday and eleven on Wednesday, that's a real result.
- Two weeks or more. The growing projects first. These are the ones that impress, because a plant that grew for 14 days can't be faked the night before.

A one-day project over five days

Here's the ramp project laid out with a week to go:

- Day: Monday · Job: Gather a toy car, three books, a long flat piece of cardboard for the ramp, masking tape and a tape measure. Print the results table · Time: 15 minutes
- Day: Tuesday · Job: Test: one try at 1, 2 and 3 books high · Time: 20 minutes
- Day: Wednesday · Job: Repeat: two more tries at each height · Time: 25 minutes
- Day: Thursday · Job: Write: means, line graph, conclusion · Time: 30 minutes
- Day: Friday · Job: Board · Time: an hour

That spreads the project's 45-minute sitting over two days and leaves the weekend free. A logbook entry each day, on paper or in Peabody's tap logbook, records the dates for the judge.

What a school expects

Schools give more time than a project needs. Peabody's organizer for teachers plans a six-week fair: the letter home six weeks out, the question checked at five weeks, testing from four weeks, the results checked at two weeks and the board due three days before. A child who starts testing four weeks out has time for any project on the list, even the three-week one, with a week left for the writing and the board.

Try tonight

Put the fair's date into the planner at the top of this page and it lays out the eight steps over the days you have, then prints for the fridge. Open Pick my project and answer "How many days until the fair?" with this weekend, about a week, or two weeks or more. Every project it offers fits. Keep the one your child likes, then put the fair date into "When is the fair?" on their My project page, and the plan lays itself out day by day.

Questions grown-ups ask

Can a science fair project really be done in one day?

The testing can, for 91 of Peabody's projects. Doing the test, the write-up and the board in one day is possible but rushed; the last-minute projects post has the ones that cope best.

How long should each sitting be?

Most one-day projects take 40 minutes to an hour for all the tries; on Peabody the shortest are 20 minutes and a few that have to wait, for water to freeze or leaves to give off water in the sun, take three or four hours. Growing projects take 10 to 20 minutes a day to water, count or measure.

What if the fair is tomorrow?

Pick a one-sitting project, do the tries tonight, and make a simple board tomorrow morning. One honest test with three tries at each level beats a fancy board with no numbers.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up. The library has free stories by reading level.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-long-does-a-science-fair-project-take