How to organize a school science fair: a six-week timeline

Peabody blog · Teaching · updated 2026-10-30

A six-week timeline for running an elementary school science fair: the letter home, two checkpoints, judging with a six-row rubric, and the safety rules to send.

Six weeks is enough to run an elementary science fair well: send the letter home six weeks out, check each child's question at five weeks, start testing at four, check results at two, collect boards three days before, and judge on the day. The two checkpoints in the middle are where most projects are rescued. A question that can't be measured, or a test done once, is easy to fix with a fortnight left and hard to fix the night before.

I built a free science fair organizer on Peabody for the teacher or PTA parent running the fair. Put in the fair date and it prints the six dated lines below, a letter home with blanks for your school's details, a six-row judging rubric, a judge's question card and a class set of blank sheets. It runs in your browser and sends nothing.

The six weeks

- When: 6 weeks before · What happens: The letter goes home with the fair date and the rules
- When: 5 weeks before · What happens: Each child's question is due, for the teacher to check
- When: 4 weeks before · What happens: Testing starts: hypothesis written, sheets printed, logbook open
- When: 2 weeks before · What happens: Results table and graph due for a check
- When: 3 days before · What happens: The board is due
- When: Fair day · What happens: The fair and judging

The letter home

Keep it short and keep it yours. The organizer's letter has blanks for the contact name and details and carries no Peabody branding, so it reads as the school's. It says what a project is (one question, one thing changed, one thing measured, three tries), lists the dates, gives the safety rules in a sentence, and asks parents to help with safety and supplies while the words and drawings stay the child's.

The safety rules to send

There's no national rule book for elementary fairs; each district writes its own. The ones I read share these: no flames, no live animals at the fair, no mold or bacteria grown at home, kitchen chemicals only, a review before any project that tests people, and nothing wet, hot or powered on the display table. The rules page lists them with the rule set each comes from, ready to adapt for your letter.

The two checkpoints

The question (five weeks out). Read each question for one thing: does it change one thing and measure one thing? "Do plants like music?" doesn't; "Do bean plants bend toward the window?" does. Send back the ones that don't with one suggested rewrite.

The results (two weeks out). Look for three tries at every level and units in the table. A child with one try per level still has time to do two more.

Judging

One district that publishes its procedures (Alpine School District, Utah) gives each project two judges and four to five minutes. The organizer's rubric has six rows, scored 1 to 4 for a total of 24:

1. Question: testable, one thing changed and one measured.
2. Method: controls named and kept, three or more tries a level.
3. Data: a clear table with units, means where expected, a graph.
4. Conclusion: uses the numbers, honest when the hypothesis was wrong.
5. Board: in order, readable from a step back, the child's own words.
6. Interview: explains the test and the results in their own words.

The judge's card has nine questions in a child's words; three are plenty for one visit. If your school uses Peabody Teach, there's also a science fair rubric in three grade bands.

Rooms, tables and the day

- One table-width per project, with the boards standing. A standard tri-fold is 48 inches wide open.
- Group by grade, so judges see like with like.
- Nothing wet, hot or alive on the tables. Say it in the letter and again the day before.
- A judging window, then an open window for families. Children stand by their boards for judging; families wander after.

Try tonight

Open the organizer, put in your fair date, and print the timeline and the letter. Then send families to Peabody's science fair page, where a child can pick a project in four taps and print every sheet the fair asks for, free and with no sign-up.

Questions grown-ups ask

How many judges do we need?

Two a project is a good rule. A judge can see roughly ten to twelve projects an hour at five minutes each, with time to write.

Should we give prizes?

That's your school's call. Many elementary fairs give every child a certificate; Peabody's My project page offers one after the fair date.

What about projects that break the rules?

Catch them at the five-week question check, and offer a version that keeps the rules: plants instead of animals, food instead of people.

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 for the classroom shelf.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-to-organize-a-school-science-fair