Last-minute science fair projects: eight you can do in one evening

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Eight real science fair projects that test in an hour or less with things already in the house, each with a results table and board plan to print tonight.

If the science fair is tomorrow, pick a project that tests in one sitting, gives a number you can count or measure, and uses what's already in the house: soak paper towels, roll a toy car down a ramp, float an egg in salt water, or fold foil boats and count the pennies they hold. Do three tries at each level, fill in a printed table, and make a simple board with the question, the table and one sentence on what happened. A small honest project beats a big unfinished one.

I built the science fair pages on Peabody for exactly this night. Every project there has the question, the If-Then-Because hypothesis half filled in, what to gather, the steps (read aloud for a child who can't read them yet), a results table and a board plan, all ready to print. Here are eight that fit one evening, with how long the testing takes.

The eight

- Project: Which paper towel soaks up the most water? · Grades: 1st–5th · Testing time: about 40 minutes · What you need: three kinds of paper towel, a teaspoon, a plate
- Project: Does sugar dissolve faster in warm water? · Grades: 2nd–6th · Testing time: about 40 minutes · What you need: sugar, three cups, a timer
- Project: Does a steeper ramp make a toy car go farther? · Grades: 2nd–6th · Testing time: about 45 minutes · What you need: a toy car, books, cardboard, a tape measure
- Project: Which boat shape carries the most pennies? · Grades: 1st–5th · Testing time: about 45 minutes · What you need: foil, pennies, a tub of water
- Project: How much salt does it take to float an egg? · Grades: 3rd–7th · Testing time: about 45 minutes · What you need: an egg, salt, a tall glass
- Project: Does more baking soda make a bigger fizz? · Grades: 3rd–8th · Testing time: about 45 minutes · What you need: baking soda, vinegar, a tall cup, goggles
- Project: Does a longer string swing slower? · Grades: 4th–8th · Testing time: about 45 minutes · What you need: string, five pennies, a pencil, a timer
- Project: Which paper bridge shape holds the most coins? · Grades: 2nd–7th · Testing time: about 50 minutes · What you need: paper, books, a small cup, pennies

Not on the list, and why: anything that grows, dries or crystallises. Beans need about ten days to sprout and crystals five; those make wonderful projects, but not tonight.

Tonight, in order

1. Pick one, together. Fifteen minutes, no more. If you can't choose, Pick my project asks four questions and hands over one.
2. Print three sheets from the project's page: the hypothesis, the results table and the board plan.
3. Write the hypothesis first, before testing. "If I change ___, then ___ will ___, because ___." A guess is a fine because.
4. Test it: three tries at every level. Write each number in the table the moment you measure it.
5. Find the middle number for each level (from 4th grade, add the three and divide by three), and draw the graph under the table.
6. Write one honest sentence: was the hypothesis right, partly right or not, and which numbers show it.
7. Lay out the board: question top left, results in the middle, conclusion on the right. The plan on the project's page gives every section's size.

What a judge will forgive, and what they won't

A plain board, wobbly writing and a hypothesis that turned out wrong are all fine. What costs points on a rushed project is usually one of three things: one try instead of three, a table with no units, or a board that shows something happening without anything being changed and measured. A baking soda volcano that just erupts is a demonstration; change the amount of baking soda and measure the foam, and it's a project.

Questions grown-ups ask

Is it cheating to help this much the night before?

Hold the ruler, read the steps, keep it safe, and ask questions. Let the child do the guessing, the measuring and the writing. Judges at elementary fairs look for a child's own words and drawings, even when a grown-up held the pen.

Do we need to buy anything?

None of the eight needs a shop. Every one uses what most kitchens and junk drawers already have.

Will one evening's project be good enough?

A small question answered well, three times, with a table and an honest conclusion, is what the fair is asking for. Plenty of bigger projects don't manage that.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up, and nothing a child taps on the science fair pages is sent anywhere. When the board is done, the

library has a bedtime story waiting.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/last-minute-science-fair-projects