A rubric for a science fair project, by grade, ready for January

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Free science fair project rubrics for K–2, 3–5 and 6–8, plus the experiment, model and poster rubrics that sit beside them. What each scores, and a January plan.

Peabody Teach's free science fair project rubric comes in three grade bands. K–2 scores five things in plain words (my question, my test, what I found, my board, talking to judges) on three levels with no points. Grades 3–5 and 6–8 score five criteria on four levels, with data counting twice, for 24 points. Beside it sit rubrics for a science experiment, a science project or model, and a poster. All of them print, copy into Google Docs and open in the rubric maker, and Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

Every criterion below is from those rubric pages as they stood on 30 October 2026. They were written for Peabody, checked by a person, and use no standards codes.

Why January

Our science fair rubric is filed under January to March, the months teachers come looking for it. January is when the rubric does the most good: handed out with the assignment, before anyone buys a display board. A student who sees "repeats the test at least three times" in week one plans three trials. A student who sees it on fair day can't go back.

Which rubric fits the assignment

- The assignment: A fair entry: question, test, board, judges · Use: Science fair project · Data or main row counts twice: Data
- The assignment: A hands-on test done in class · Use: Science experiment · Data or main row counts twice: Observations (3–5) or data (6–8)
- The assignment: A model or display that shows an idea · Use: Science project · Data or main row counts twice: The science idea
- The assignment: A poster that teaches a topic · Use: Poster · Data or main row counts twice: Content

If your fair allows both tests and models, the science project rubric is the one for a model of the solar system, and the science fair rubric is the one for "Which paper towel holds the most water?"

Grades K–2: five rows, no points

- Criteria: My question · "I can" line: I can ask a question I can test.
- Criteria: My test · "I can" line: I can do a test and write down what I see.
- Criteria: What I found · "I can" line: I can tell what I found out.
- Criteria: My board · "I can" line: I can make a board that shows my steps.
- Criteria: Talking to judges · "I can" line: I can tell the judges about my project.

Each row has three levels: Wow!, Yes and Not yet. The top cell for "My test" is "I test more than once and write or draw what I see each time." That is the fair-test idea in words a first grader can follow. Print the "I can" checklist from the page and send it home, so a family knows what the judges will ask.

Grades 3–5: five rows, 24 points

- Criteria: Question and prediction · What "Exceeds" asks for: A clear, testable question and a prediction with a reason from what is already known
- Criteria: Fair test · What "Exceeds" asks for: Changes one thing, keeps the rest the same, repeats the test at least three times, follows the safety steps
- Criteria: Data (×2) · What "Exceeds" asks for: Every result in a neat table with units, and a correct, labeled graph
- Criteria: Conclusion · What "Exceeds" asks for: Says whether the prediction was right, uses the data as proof, suggests a next test
- Criteria: Board and talk · What "Exceeds" asks for: A neat board in order, and a talk that explains each step and answers questions

Grades 6–8: five rows, 24 points

- Criteria: Question and hypothesis · What "Exceeds" asks for: A focused, testable question and an if-then hypothesis with a reason from cited research
- Criteria: Variables and procedure · What "Exceeds" asks for: Names the independent, dependent and controlled variables, uses a control group, runs enough trials, lists safety steps
- Criteria: Data analysis (×2) · What "Exceeds" asks for: Clear tables with units, the right kind of graph, averages and patterns described accurately
- Criteria: Conclusion and error · What "Exceeds" asks for: Supports or rejects the hypothesis with specific data, names sources of error, suggests further research
- Criteria: Board and interview · What "Exceeds" asks for: A clear board with cited sources, and a talk that answers questions using the data

Notice what grows from band to band: "I test more than once" becomes "at least three times" and then "enough trials" with named variables. The goal stays; the demand rises.

A January plan

1. Week one: hand out the rubric for your band with the assignment. Read the top column aloud.
2. Week two: students write their question. Check it against the first row before anyone starts testing.
3. Week three: testing. Point at the fair test row: one change, everything else the same, and the safety steps you gave.
4. Week four: data and conclusion. The doubled row is where the time should go.
5. The week before the fair: a practice run, with classmates as judges using the same rubric.

For judges, print one rubric per project. There are good questions for them in science fair judging questions, and the whole event is planned out in how to organize a school science fair.

Make it fit your fair

Press "Open in the maker" under your band. In the rubric maker you can rename a row, change a weight to ×1, ×2 or ×3, add up to eight criteria (a "Research log" row, say), or switch to a single-point rubric for the practice run. Nothing you type is sent to our server, and there is no sign-in.

There is a longer comparison of the science rubrics in a rubric for a science project. Peabody is also a free reading site for kids: the stories your students can read at home are in the library.

Questions

What should a science fair project rubric include?

The question or hypothesis, the plan for a fair test, the data, the conclusion, and the board and talk to the judges. Peabody's science fair rubric scores those five, with data counting twice in grades 3–8.

Is there a science fair rubric for kindergarten to 2nd grade?

Yes. The K–2 band scores five things in a child's words, from "My question" to "Talking to judges", on three levels (Wow!, Yes, Not yet) with no points by default. Its "I can" checklist prints on its own.

Can judges use the same rubric?

Yes. The rubric page suggests it as the judges' score sheet. Print one per project, with the name and date line, or open it in the maker first to add a row your fair needs. It is free through

the end of 2026.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/rubric-for-science-fair-project