Science fair display board layout: what goes where on a tri-fold

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What goes where on a 36 × 48 inch science fair tri-fold board, each section's size in inches, the order judges read it in, and a free plan to print.

A science fair tri-fold reads like a page, left to right and top to bottom: the question and hypothesis on the left panel, what you did and what you found in the middle under the title, and the conclusion on the right. On a standard 36 × 48 inch board the middle panel is 24 inches wide and the two wings are 12 each. The results (your table and graph) get the most room, because they are what a judge asks about.

I built a board layout tool on Peabody that lays the six sections out to scale, says each card's size in inches, and prints the plan at 1:12 with the headers full size. Here is the classic layout it starts from, and why each section sits where it does.

The classic layout

- Section: Question · Where: left panel, top · Card size: 10 × 8 in · What goes on it: Your question, big enough to read from a step away
- Section: Hypothesis · Where: left panel, middle · Card size: 10 × 9 in · What goes on it: If… then… because…, in your own words
- Section: Materials · Where: left panel, bottom · Card size: 10 × 12 in · What goes on it: Everything you used, with amounts
- Section: Title · Where: middle panel, top · Card size: 22 × 5 in · What goes on it: The question again, or a short name for the project
- Section: Steps · Where: middle panel, under the title · Card size: 22 × 9 in · What goes on it: What you did, numbered, so someone could repeat it
- Section: Results · Where: middle panel, bottom · Card size: 22 × 16 in · What goes on it: Your table and your graph: the heart of the board
- Section: Conclusion · Where: right panel, top · Card size: 10 × 14 in · What goes on it: Right, partly right or not, which numbers show it, what next

The space under the conclusion is for photos or drawings of your test. Most school rules say nothing wet, hot, powered or alive on the display table, so pictures are how the judge sees what you did.

Why that order

Judges usually have only a few minutes at each board, and they read the way everyone reads. The question first tells them what you wanted to know; the hypothesis tells them what you thought; the materials and steps tell them it was a fair test; the results show what happened; the conclusion says what it means. If they have to hunt for any of those, you've lost some of your few minutes.

The results go in the middle because that's where eyes land after the title, and because the table and graph are what the judge will point at when they ask "What did you find out?"

Two other layouts

The tool offers two more. Big results gives the whole middle panel to the table and graph and moves the steps to the right wing under the conclusion; good for a project with a lot of data, like a pendulum tested at three lengths and three weights. Big question puts the question across the top of the middle under the title, for a younger child whose question is the most important thing they did.

Making the cards

- Print, then copy by hand. A child's own writing and drawings are what elementary judges favour. One district's rules tell its judges to favour children's own language and drawings over typing.
- Mark the folds first. Lay the board flat, measure 12 inches in from each side, and lightly pencil the fold lines so no card crosses one.
- Cards before glue. Cut every card to size, lay them all out, step back, then glue.
- Headers you can read from across the room. The tool prints each section name full size, one to a page, ready to cut out.

Try tonight

The drawing at the top of this page shows the classic layout to scale, numbered in reading order. Open the board layout tool, pick a layout and a colour, then tap each section card and tap where it goes. If the card is in the wrong place, Peabody says which gap it belongs in. Print the plan and the headers, and the board is half done. If you haven't picked a project yet, start with Pick my project; every project's page has its own board plan already filled in.

Questions grown-ups ask

What size board should we buy?

A 36 × 48 inch tri-fold is the standard, and it fits the size limits in the school rule sets I read (one district's limit is 30 inches deep, 48 wide and 96 high). Check your school's sheet.

Should the board be typed?

Not for elementary fairs. A child's own writing, even wobbly, shows the work is theirs. A typed title is fine.

What goes on the table in front of the board?

The logbook, and photos or drawings of the test. Most rules ban liquids, batteries and open containers on display.

Peabody (peabody.kids) is free through the end of 2026, with no ads and no sign-up. When the board is drying, the library has a story waiting.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/science-fair-display-board-layout