Virtual science fair: how to enter one, and how to run one

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How a virtual science fair works: the six-slide board saved as a PDF, the talk, judging by entry code from home, and keeping children's names and faces off the files.

A virtual science fair asks for the same project as a paper one, just sent instead of carried: the six parts of the board (Question, Hypothesis, Materials, Steps, Results, Conclusion) as slides or a PDF, sometimes with a short recorded explanation, judged from a screen. For a child entering one, the work is identical up to the board. For the grown-up running one, the hard parts are collecting files without collecting children's details, and judging fairly from home.

I built a virtual board on Peabody for the child's side: it turns their project into six sideways slides, one part on each, ready to print or save as a PDF. For the organiser's side, the fair-night tally judges by entry code on each judge's own phone. Here's how both fit together.

Entering a virtual fair

1. Do the project exactly as you would for a paper fair. One question, one thing changed, one thing measured, three tries at every level. Pick my project finds one in four taps.
2. Put the numbers in the Graph Maker. It works out the mean and draws the graph.
3. Open the virtual board. The six slides fill themselves in from the project your child kept and the numbers from the Graph Maker. The two parts that should be in their own words, the "because" of the hypothesis and the conclusion, are left as lines to write on.
4. Save as PDF. Tap "Print or save my 6 slides", then choose "Save as PDF" where the printer's name is. The slides are in big type, one part on each.
5. Add photos if the fair allows them: the cups lined up, the ruler against the plant, the ball beside the tape. Photos of the test, not of your child.
6. Practise the talk. Some virtual fairs ask for a short spoken explanation. Peabody the judge asks the questions a judge asks and helps build a 60-second talk. If the fair wants a recording, a grown-up decides where it goes. Peabody never asks a child to post a video or a photo of themselves.

Naming the file

Name the PDF with the entry code the fair gives you (say, B7-board.pdf), not your child's name. If the fair hasn't given codes, ask the teacher what they'd like, and keep names out of anything that might be shared beyond them.

Running a virtual fair

The six-week timeline is the same as a paper fair, and the organizer prints it from your fair date: the letter home six weeks out, questions checked at five weeks, testing from four, results checked at two, boards (here, files) due three days before, then judging.

What changes is fair day.

- Give every entry a code. The fair-night tally makes them (A1, A2… a letter for each grade band) and prints a key for you to write each child's name beside. The key stays on your paper, never in a shared folder.
- Collect files named by code. Ask families to send only the board PDF and any photos of the test, named by code.
- Send each judge a batch of codes and their files. Two judges an entry is a good rule; the organizer's rubric has six rows scored 1 to 4.
- Judges score on their phones. Each judge opens their own judge card from a QR code, taps a code, taps 1 to 4 on each row and picks one line for the child from a list ("Your table and graph were clear", "Next time: put the units on your numbers"). Their scores stay on their phone until they send you the file, by whatever route they choose, and you open it in the tally.
- The tally ranks by the average of the judges who scored each entry, within each grade band, and shows ties without breaking them.
- Print certificates by code and place; you write the names on paper.

Nothing in the tally or the judge cards is sent to Peabody. Clear the device when the fair is done.

If your fair is bigger

A regional-sized fair may want registration software. zFairs, one such service, says on its own front page (read 31 October 2026) that it handles registration, judging and awards for in-person fairs and "virtual showcases". A class or school fair rarely needs that much: a shared folder, codes and a phone each is enough.

What judges look for on a screen

The same six rubric rows as in a gym: a testable question, a fair method with controls and three or more tries, a clear table and graph, a conclusion that uses the numbers, a board that reads in order, and an explanation in the child's own words. On a screen the board row matters more, because a judge can't step back and take it in: one part to a slide, big type, and the graph large enough to read are what the virtual board is built for. The display board layout post covers the order.

Keeping it safe

- Codes, not names, on every file and every score.
- Photos of the test, not of children. A hand holding a ruler is fine; a face isn't needed.
- Recordings, if any, go to the teacher only, and the teacher decides how long to keep them.
- No public gallery of children's work unless every family has said yes, in writing, to that exact use.

Questions grown-ups ask

Can a child enter a virtual fair without a printer?

Yes. The virtual board saves straight to PDF, and nothing needs printing.

How long should a recorded explanation be?

Whatever the fair says. Without a rule, about a minute: what was changed, what was measured, what happened, and one surprise. That's what the 60-second talk practises.

Do the judges need accounts?

Not on Peabody. The judge card opens from a QR code on the judge's phone, with no sign-up.

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. The library has stories by reading level, for a screen that isn't a slide.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/virtual-science-fair