

Do's and Don'ts

#1 Spelling Counts!

You have worked too hard and come too far to let the spelling slide! Make sure you get it right! If your project is in the final running, this could eliminate you, so make sure to spell every word correctly.

#2 Effect vs. Affect

Confusing "affect" with "effect" is a common mistake in a lot of science fair projects. Unfortunately, mistaking the proper form of the word is most noticeable when it is used in the title of your project. The rule that applies in most cases is as follows: If you are using the word as a verb, then "affect" is the correct spelling. If you are using the word as a noun, then "effect" is the correct spelling.

#3 Avoid Unreadable Fonts

It's okay to express a little creativity in your graphics and fonts, but don't overuse fancy unreadable fonts in your project. It makes it hard for the judges to read and they don't have a lot of time to spend on your project. Make your fonts crisp, clear, and easy to read.

#4 Avoid "Title Wrap-Around"

There are 3 panels to just about every science fair board; the left, right, and center. When designing your project, try to make sure that the title of your project stays within the center panel and doesn't extend into the left and right panels. This is called "wrap-around" and can be visually distracting to the viewer.

#5 "Sticky Situations"- Lay It Out First!

Make sure to lay out all of the pieces you are going to glue on the board before you glue them. This is so important! Once those pieces are glued... you are stuck! It's also a good idea to experiment with a variety of different layouts before deciding which is best. Get some help from adults. What looks good to you might not look as good to others. Get opinions from friends, family members, aunts, uncles, even your dog, Fideaux. It is also a good idea to put your best "eye-catching stuff" in the center panel. Did you hear that? Put your best stuff in the center! Whatever you decide, make sure all the pieces fit on the board before gluing or you will be in sticky situation and well, you'll be stuck!

#6 Tape vs. Glue

I have absolutely no scientific reasoning for this but, use glue instead of tape. I can only rely on my past experience with this so listen carefully. Tape just looks bad. I have no idea why, but every project that I have seen that uses tape just does not look as good as it can be. This judgment holds true for all types of tape. Masking tape, scotch tape, electrical tape, duct tape, tape on the corners, tape on the edges, tape in front, tape behind... all looks bad. Trust me. Don't use it! "Yeah, but you can't see the tape behind". It looks bad. Trust me. If you need to use tape on the models you are designing, then by all means... DO. Just use it sparingly and exercise good judgment. A final word about glue. When using glue, it is important to use the right amount. You don't want your glue to drip or "ooze" from under the pages. Elmer's glue sticks seem to work the best. They keep the pages you glue from wrinkling, don't result in drippage, and for the most part, secures the pages fairly well.

#7 Picture It!

The old saying, "pictures are worth a thousand words" speaks volumes in science fair projects. Pictures look great! No question about it. If you want your project to shine, use pictures wherever possible. They catch the attention of the viewer, help you to fill up your board space, and demonstrate to the judges exactly what you

did. When using pictures, it is important to plan ahead. Have a good camera and let an adult help you "frame" your pictures accurately. Also, if you are doing an experiment that involves several days (called a longitudinal study), be sure to allow time to get your pictures developed. If you elect to use pictures (and I hope you do), lighting and focusing are very important or they can diminish the impact of your project. In other words, do your pictures justice and **DO THEM WELL!** Also, refer to the other secrets on this list when laying out your pictures on the board.

#8 Construct Without "Construction"

As oxymoronic as this sounds... it's true. Following the same lack of scientific evidence as Secret #6, using construction paper to wallpaper your board just doesn't look good and isn't a good idea. Fancy backgrounds on web pages are distracting to the visitor especially if there is content that needs to be read. Think of your project as a web page. You want the judge to be able to read what you did without getting sunburn from the blast of colors you have used to wallpaper your board. For this reason, stick with the basic board colors that have been given to you. Black and white science boards work best. You can still use lots of color without sacrificing the "whitespace" that you have been given (see the next secret for a full explanation of "whitespace").

#9 Avoid "Whitespace"

"Whitespace" is the amount of space on your board that is unused after your project is done. This is another reason to lay out all of your pieces before gluing because if you find that you don't have enough "stuff" to put on your board, you still have time to add pieces or enlarge the pieces that you have. Whitespace is one sure way to bore the viewer. If there is a lot of whitespace on your board it can possibly mean two things. One, your pieces are so small that it cannot be read unless using a magnifying glass, or two, you just don't have enough "stuff".

#10 Border To Avoid Boredom

Placing a piece of colored construction paper behind your 8 1/2" x 11" piece of paper will make a nice border helping the pieces stand out. Now, I know you are thinking, "Yeah, but you said construct without construction" and you would be right. But here, the difference is that you are using construction paper to accentuate your pieces rather than wallpapering your project board with construction paper. The borders created by doing this measure no more than a couple of centimeters and make your project look good. The colors you choose are up to you. All colors look good for the most part, but if you want to take it step further, using color themes (discussed in next section) make projects look even better. The same rule holds true for web designing as well. Go figure.

#11 Color Themes

So, what exactly are color themes? Color themes are two or more contrasting colors used throughout a project that compliment each other adding to the overall aesthetic value of the project. What? Look at this way... if you are a female student, you most likely choose colors to wear that kinda sorta match, right? Boys, well, they just throw on anything to look cool, so they will have to work a little harder at understanding this. Colors look good because they contrast each other. You wouldn't think of wearing a bright orange shirt with pair of navy plaid pants because the colors clash with each other. Take a look at some of your parent's grade school pictures and you will see exactly what I mean. The 1960's and 70's were notorious for color mismatches. Black, white, and grays pretty much contrast any color and are safe to use as your additional colors. The point is to try to do this as best as you can in designing your project. Coloring your board a burnt orange, then using blue paper with pink titles is like wearing plaid pants with an orange shirt. It just doesn't match!

#12 Type It!

We are now in the year 2006 and just about everyone has access to a computer and word processor. If you plan ahead and I know you are because you are reading this right now, then plan to type every piece of your project. With the exception of drawings and sketches you should be typing everything! This includes graphs, which can be done through a spreadsheet program. Imagine a businessman who has to make a presentation at his company board meeting. He explains to the board members that his printer broke down the night before and he had to hand write his presentation. Only, the writing is a little hard to read so he asks all the members to put on their eyeglasses and huddle close together next to his presentation board to see it. My guess is that this guy will be out of a job the next day! Remember, this page is designed for those who want their projects to be in the "elite" category. So, on that note, make sure to type everything! You don't want the judges huddling together with magnifying glasses to see the work you have done because they will have just about as much patience as those board members.

#13 **Get It Straight!**

I have always been known as a straight shooter, so...can I be straight with you? When gluing your pieces on your board, make every effort to make them straight. Now, if your plan is to glue them at different angles, then fine. That variation can work well and there are many projects where offsetting angles are the intent. But, there are also many projects where the titles and pieces are intended to be straight and they are crooked! I will simply tell you that if your intention is to make them straight, then GET IT STRAIGHT!

#14 **Catchy Titles**

This is a minor thing, but still worth mentioning. Try to find a catchy title. "*A Phosphate Worse Than Death*" capitalized on the expression, "A Fate Worse Than Death" and was quite catchy. "*The Truth About Paper Towels*" is also interesting. Try to avoid titles that are too long, which can be used in the problem statement instead. Make your title clear and to the point and if at all possible, make them "catchy". Remember, the title can be in the form of a statement or a question.

#15 **Don't Re-invent The Wheel...**

...unless of course, your project is on wheel invention...LOL. No, what I mean is that you don't have to necessarily find something that has never been done before. You may elect to take a topic you've seen in fairs and do it a different way. This goes along the lines of what I said in the previous secret. Use the resource links to generate ideas. Once you find something you like, do it differently or do it better. The winners that were selected from last year's fair were not chosen because they did something that no one had ever done. They were chosen because of the evident work and time they put into it and their ability to apply scientific thought as well as the scientific method. Most of the projects that won last year demonstrate at least six weeks worth of work. If you try to do this the night before it's due, you will not be successful. So, the key is to work hard on the topic that you choose and remember that it is not so important to re-invent the wheel, unless of course your project is on..., oh, forget it, you get it. :-)

#16 **SCIENCE COUNTS!**

In the end, it all comes down to science. Your ability to apply scientific thought, reasoning, and concepts is what will inevitably make your science fair project stand out. All winners last year excelled in the area of science and technology. Your project is not a research paper! You must be able to design and/or build a model or perform an experiment of some kind and report your results through your project. It must fit into the scientific method in some way and demonstrate scientific reasoning, inquiry, and concepts. If it doesn't do this, following all the guidelines above will not help. So, my last bit of advice to you is this...Don't fall into the trap of doing your project the last second. Don't do this! You must be able to plan ahead especially if you are planning an experiment that will involve several days. In the end, how well your project is received scientifically by the judges will weigh heavily because, SCIENCE COUNTS!

The Judges: Who Are They?

They are a bunch of black-cloaked old men and women, who don't like kids, never smile, and come out their caves once a year to judge science fairs...LOL. Actually, the judges at Region 5 are a group of science professionals that hail from McNeese State University, the local industries, the Calcasieu Parish School system, the medical profession, local businesses, and government agencies. They have given up their Saturday (day of judging) to come out and dedicate their time to our youth and science - and for this we are eternally grateful ! Louisiana Region 5 has been conducting science fairs for 51 years! Each year we try to recruit the best people throughout the state to judge the fair.

The LR5SEF is an event that features the best science fair projects from grades 3-12 in a six parish area. Participants compete with other students in their division and prizes are awarded within each division.

Winning at the Louisiana Region 5 Science & Engineering Fair is a most notable distinction and can be included in a college application in future years. The judges are all very nice and volunteer countless hours in the field of science and science education.

Still Have Questions?

Feel free to email me or call me at anytime. I will be happy to answer any questions you might have. Best of luck in designing your science fair project!