Making You Project A Winner

There's no guaranteed way to assure yourself of winning, but there are some things you can do that will improve your chances. First you should have fun doing your science fair project as well as learning about the world around you. If your project is not fun, not something you like doing, it will be difficult to make a winner out of it. What you need to do are the following:

1. **<u>Pick Something You're Interested In</u> -** The most important step is to pick a project that you really want to do, and one you can get enthusiastic about completing. Don't pick a project just because you think it looks easy, or because you have a friend that did the same project last year. What's more important to the judges is your ability to demonstrate that you understand your project and that you have researched the issues and are knowledgeable of the scientific and technical facts that relate to your project.

2. **<u>Don't wait until the last minute to start your project</u> -** To have a winning project you have to spend quite a bit of time thinking about how it should work and planning out how to do it. Winning projects are NOT ones you throw together at the last minute thinking the judges won't notice how skimpy your research is. How long a project should take depends on the project itself. Some you might be able to do in a week or two, others will require a month or more if done right. You need to have plenty of time to research background references and read about your topic, plenty of time to plan and do you experiments, and even some extra time built in just in case you need to repeat experiments that get ruined. And even after the research and experimentation is over, you need time to prepare both your written report and your display for the fair itself.

3. **<u>Do the Work Yourself</u> -** There's nothing wrong in asking for help. Other people can certainly share resources with you, advise you about how to set up the experiment, even show you how to complete some tests. But while others can advise you, make sure that you do the work yourself, and write your own reports. Doing the work yourself will give you a much better understanding of how things work and why or why not your experimental results turned out the way they did. And remember... when the judges are at your exhibit, asking questions about your project, your friends won't be there to explain what was in a reference book you listed in your bibliography, your parents won't be there to explain why one part of the experiment was altered, and your teachers won't be there to explain why certain substances may have been substituted for others and why the experiment is still valid despite the substitution. When the judges are standing there, quizzing you, YOU have to know those answers, and the best way to learn them is to have done the work yourself.

4. **<u>Don't Get Upset If Your Hypothesis Is Incorrect</u> -** The whole purpose of an experimental science fair project is to see IF a certain hypothesis is correct, not to prove that you were right. When you state your hypothesis you are saying, "I think this will happen, based on my research." But there are many factors that can cause a hypothesis to be incorrect, and sometimes, some of the most important discoveries are made because a hypothesis was wrong, not right. It's more important to understand what DID happen in your experiment that to have had a hypothesis proven.

5. **<u>Keep Accurate Records From Beginning to End</u> -** After your project is completed is NOT the time to go back, relying on memory and trying to construct a project data book. Get yourself a set of 3x5 cards or a spiral notebook and keep accurate notes from the very first day. Good notes demonstrate your consistency and thoroughness to the judges and will be invaluable in helping you prepare your final report.

6. **<u>Prepare An Attractive, Informative Display</u> -** A neat, attractive display makes it easy for the judges and visitors to examine your project and the results you achieved. Avoid the temptation to cram too much information into too small a space, which makes your display look cluttered and confusing. Pick out the 4 or 5 most important parts of your project and use them as heads which should stand out more boldly than the rest. If you have them available, make liberal use of colorful graphs and pie charts as a means of displaying your data in a form that is quickly understood.

7. **<u>Tips For Your Display</u>:** Most display boards are of the 3-panel version, but you should check well in advance to make sure that your display is correctly presented and sturdily constructed. Your display should not be flimsy and prone to collapsing or falling over. Make sure you observe the size limitations and follow all appropriate safety rules when preparing your display. Any required forms will have to be displayed so plan room for them right off the bat.

   Good luck on your project!!!