



2026

YES Fair

JUDGES MANUAL

Our YES Fair Judges are the true backbone of the fair. We can't thank you enough for your dedication to the fair and the students of Southeast Arizona.

As part of the continued growth process, this manual (modified from the Canadian Science Fair) helps define the fair and give judges some guidance and context to better serve our students.

The YES Fair is the only regional fair south of Tucson that is affiliated with the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF). Although affiliation with ISEF adds a little complexity to our fair, this affiliation provides local students with the opportunity to compete at the regional, state, national, and international levels. It also provides the opportunity for our students to receive regional and national awards and recognition that would otherwise not be available to them.

History of the YES Fair

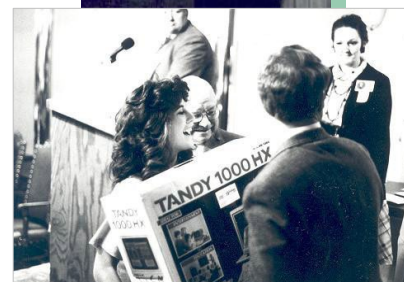
by LaDonna Burgess

In 1984 Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative sponsored its first science fair with seventeen student entries. What started as SSVEC's Youth Energy Science (YES) Fair in connection with National Energy Education Day and SSVEC's annual meeting, has grown into one of the major science fairs in the Southwest, recognized by and affiliated with the International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF).



The second YES Fair was held at the old Buena High School Gym in Sierra Vista. The Armed Forces Communications and Electronics Association (AFCEA) held a small science fair in the school's library at the same time. The two fairs joined forces in 1986 and the fair continues today as the Youth Engineering and Science Fair, currently presented and sponsored by the SSVEC Foundation.

Our mission at the YES Fair is to give students in grades 5 through 12 throughout Southeast Arizona the opportunity to display, compete and earn recognition for their projects. We provide opportunity for students to think, discover, research, produce, and learn! We nurture an interest for work and careers in various fields to build a better America. We inspire and motivate students by awarding certificates, money, and prizes for gaining knowledge and skills in science and engineering, the backbone of the modern day world.



At the high school level, the YES Fair awards all-expense-paid trips to the top two projects and their advisers to compete in the International Science and Engineering Fair. These students compete with other student scientists from around the world for awards. The location of the ISEF changes each year and over the past 19 years has included major U.S. cities, as well as Canada and Puerto Rico.



Along with the Grand Prize winners, many other students are recognized and receive awards. Significant monetary contributions from the SSVEC Foundation provide core funds and prizes. Sponsors from local businesses also donate prizes to inspire and reward participants.

Today, SSVEC continues to organize and carry out each fair with the help of numerous employees and many volunteers. Local professionals help support and continue the fair program. Judges from the local community, military, scientific, technical, governmental and academic fields review and select the prize-winning exhibits.



Students participating in YES Fair go on to pursue successful careers as doctors, teachers, engineers, soldiers, farmers, scientists, public officials, and, parents.

Science and its discoveries are learned from setbacks as well as successes. The YES Fair, through the efforts of SSVEC encourages, motivates and rewards our youth, the foundation of our fu



The Roles of a Judge

The Judging role is multifaceted, and judging is more than putting scores in the computer. As a judge you will step into several roles throughout the judging day.

Evaluator

The main role of a Judge is to evaluate the various projects and assign them a score. You will be evaluating the project based on what you see. Quality of work and presentation fit into this function as a judge.

Facilitator (9-12 Division only)

In the afternoon, you get to meet the students. You will still be evaluating the project, but you will also be a Facilitator, creating an open and positive atmosphere allowing the student to comfortably tell you about their project and the research that they did. This role is important because quality of your facilitation will result in the amount of information you will receive to make an accurate evaluation of the project.

Counselor (9-12 Division only)

When a student asks you, "What could I have done better in this project?", you have then stepped into the role of a counselor. You can make a recommendation about what could have taken the project up to the next level of quality.

Motivator

An important role of a judge is to give the student some compliments that will make them feel good about their work and motivate them to compete again. The students have put in a lot of work to compete in the fair and pointing out positive aspects of their project can encourage growth. Even the simplest compliment given to a student can spur them on to future success in life.

Role Model

Remember that when communicating with the students, you are in the role of the judge, a leader in the community, from business or academia. Your actions portray to the students what the science fair is all about. Take care in what you do and say in the presence of the students.

Provide a good experience for the Competitors

As a judge you can provide a good experience for the student competitors by using the following tips:

- Be genuine
- Let the contestants show their stuff
- Encourage conversation
- Avoid value judgments
- Give one opportunity for improvement
- Recognize 3 project strengths
- End meeting on a positive note
- Smile

Judge Behavior with Students

When with students, there are things that you can do to make the interaction a learning experience for the students and an enjoyable experience for you:

- Examine the quality of the student's work. Look for evidence of laboratory, field or theoretical work, not just library research. Projects should use the scientific method or the engineering design process to test and analyze data or create solutions to problems.
- Keep in mind that competing in a science fair is not only a competition, but an educational and motivating experience for the students.
- If the project is a continuation of a prior project ONLY the work done in the past year is to be evaluated. Prior work is important but should not unduly impact the judging of this year's project.
- Show you are interested.
- Listen actively.
- Give positive reinforcement to nourish self-esteem (say what you like about project).
- Work to put students at ease. If students are intimidated, they will not speak freely.
- Ask students about their project, not just what they did.
- Ask students enough questions to satisfy yourself that they understood the project.
- When you have reached the student's knowledge limit, STOP asking questions.
- Have 1 positive comment for every student.
- Remember when you were 14 years old, and you had to talk to an "adult."
- Let the student teach you something.

Sample Questions

These are some good sample questions that will spur on conversations during the judging process.

- Why did you decide to study this topic?
- What are your controlled variables?
- How accurate are your readings?
- What future applications can you see from the results of this project?
- What is one outstanding thing did you learn doing this project?
- How would you improve this project if you did it again?

Suggested Wording

Personalize your language

- I liked...
- I enjoyed...
- I feel that...
- I see that...

If Asked

- I suggest...
- A technique I have used...
- The project would have more impact if...

What to Expect on a typical Judging Day

- 7am continental breakfast
- 7:30am pick up name tags and check-in
- 7:55-8am announcements for judges (near stage)
- 8am scan QR code; clipboards with assigned projects distributed; judging begins
- 10:30am-12pm lunch buffet
- 12 pm high school interviews begin. High school judging continues for the next couple of hours until complete

Judges for 5/6th and 7/8th are welcome to judge past noon, but most are typically done before noon

Judging Hints & Tips

- Look at all of your category exhibits before starting to judge your exhibits.
- Don't be late and pace your work to keep on schedule.
- Set timing goals for your exhibits (10-15 min per project)
- **The project display is the “splash page” or “advertisement” for the project.**
 - **The real project work is located in the full Abstract and the Project Notebook**
- Contestants' understanding of the project is more important than a fancy display
- If stuck on a project or any technical difficulties, see the “Judges Host”

How to Judge a Project

Before starting, take a quick second look of all of your assigned projects, to get a feel for what they are about, what they look like, and where they are located.

- Enter the project number and your judge's number in the online form, double check for accuracy, including science verses engineering.
- Read through the backboard in some logical order; assess its impact, and how well it tells the "story" of the project. Were you able to understand quickly what the project is trying to do, and what the results were?
- If equipment or devices are part of the display, do they serve an obvious purpose, based on what you have seen so far?
- Read through the abstract. Assess it. (If missing, ask for it in interview.)
- Lower Division: look for something that looks close to an abstract
- Read through the workbook (journal and/or full report). Assess it.
- Write down your questions and compliments, for use in the Interview, and add to comments section of the judging form.
- Score the project on your smart device.
- Remember not to "team-judge" but be sure to ask your Judges Host if you have any questions during judging.
- Submit your scores

Goals for using this scoring system

The judging forms we use at the YES Fair are also used by Science Fair Central with some of our own edits. The following section explains how the form works and how it will help you as a Judge accurately “grade” the project.

Our goal is to reduce the amount of time spent in determining the placements of awards.

The purpose of the interview process is to prepare the students for ISEF. All High School projects will have an interview with two to three judges. These Judges will have already read and scored the project. The projects with the higher scores (ISEF potential) may be interviewed by a second interview round with all Judges.

Score sheets will then be tallied, and the projects ranked by score. In the case of a tie at a specific award level, discussion and consensus of the Judges will determine final ranking.

Using the Judging Form

As a judge, the main tools that you will use are a smart phone/tablet. To use the judging form effectively, please note the following:

The Form:

- To access the form, you will either be given the URL or a QR code the day of judging. You will enter an access code to continue. Do not share these numbers.
- You will also need to enter your judge’s number and project number. It is extremely important to make sure the project number matches the project you are judging!
- Projects are broken into SCIENCE or ENGINEERING. The project display board sticker will have a designation of S or E to help you out.
- Please remember to not start out scoring everything as a “10.” If you start out lower, you can always go higher if there is a better project.
- If you want to rescore/go back and edit a project, you will need to click “submit another response.” We will get both submittals and will use the last one submitted. Please note this on your assigned project list.
- Scores will be calculated automatically in Forms. All you do is submit!
- If any issues arise, please let us know ASAP.
- Please do not discuss projects or scoring with other judges.
- Turn in your assigned project list to the judge’s table.

* Required

ACCESS CODE

1. CODE *

The value must be a number

Next

Never give out your password. [Report abuse](#)

PROJECT INFORMATION

3. PROJECT DIVISION *

Please select the DIVISION (the first 2 digits of the on the project label.)

☐ 56

☐ 78

☐ 912

4. PROJECT NUMBER *

Please enter the PROJECT number (The last 4 digits on the project label.)

Number must be between 1000 ~ 6500

5. TYPE *

Type of Project

☐ SCIENCE

☐ ENGINEERING

Back

Submit

YES FAIR JUDGE EVALUATION TEST

* Required

SCI - DISPLAY

Content is paramount, but good presentation may suggest an attention to detail.

7. Neatness *

Clarity with appropriate use of text, images, graphics, tables, and graphs

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

POOR

WELL DONE

8. Completeness *

Includes these 6 elements of Abstract, Introduction, Problem, Goals, Results, Conclusions"

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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POOR

WELL DONE

9. Abstract on Display *

Is there an Abstract on (or with) the display?

☐ YES

☐ NO

Back

Next



Your response was submitted.

Important thing you can do next

Save my response

[Submit another response](#)

Feedback to the Student:

Comments for Students (check any that apply) ☐ (1) Good use of photos ☐ (2) Excellent display ☐ (3) Interesting topics explore it more for next year ☐ (4) Run the experiment more times to see if the trend continues. ☐ (5) Text is hard to read ☐ (6) Increase the size of your ☐ (7) control group ☐ (8) sample group ☐ (9) Good Graphs ☐ (10) Be careful about spelling ☐ (11) Great Job ☐ (12) You need more quantifiable data ☐ (13) Missing Abstract ☐ (14) Missing Workbook / notebook ☐ (15) Good Teamwork	Additional Comments:
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All comments for the project need to be written in the Judge's Notebook on the table. The notebook includes prompts similar to above. After the fair, teachers will be given the notebook and students will see these comments.

Final Word

Thank you for your participation and volunteering your time as a judge. The YES Fair would not be successful without its many volunteers from the community.