

## **A GUIDE TO SOCIAL STUDIES FAIR PROJECTS**

This portion of the Social Studies Fair Bulletin is intended to identify key elements in a social studies project, describes how those elements should be developed, and offer incidental information for teachers and students about how to initiate, develop, and present a social studies fair project.

The information in this part of the Bulletin is intended for teachers, students, fair committee members, and judges. Since teachers are an essential resource in the development of social studies fair projects, it is important that they have proper, accurate information about fair projects to share with their students. Students can use this portion of the guide to help avoid wasted time and reduce their frustration in the development of fair projects. Fair committee members must respond to many questions from both teachers and students about the social studies fair so the information here can help them respond easily and accurately to inquiries and questions. Finally, the information within this section can be of use to judges who must decide which project among many, is most worthy of recognition.

### **THE BASICS OF A SOCIAL STUDIES FAIR PROJECT**

The development of every social studies fair project should consider these things:

- A. A topic
- B. A physical display
- C. A research paper
- D. An oral presentation

Selection a topic:

In selection and identifying a topic for use in a social studies fair project several things should be kept in mind. It is essential that the student topic establish some relationship to man. The topic and project should be distinctly related to the social sciences and history. Beware of the overlap that can occur with a topic. For example, a student might select a topic related to Native Americans. Depending on the topic treatment, the project could apply to any number of disciplines. The project could examine the history of Native Americans (history), how they earned their living (economics), their customs (anthropology), how they lived together (sociology), government policy toward Native Americans (political science), or where they lived (geography). It is important that the student make it very clear that the topic and its treatment are distinctly related to the discipline chosen for the competition.

Students must avoid the use of topics that are clearly related to pure science areas. For example, the study of geology should not be confused with geography and dinosaurs should not be included in a project unless there is a clear relationship to humans.

The best way for a student to select a topic is to identify something about which they are curious; students always have questions about many different topics, subjects, events, people, and places. The student should identify one of these or anything else that may pique their curiosity, then contemplate the subject matter.

In considering a topic, remember:

1. Value: The topic should be enlightening on some significant aspect of human experience.
2. Originality: If a project has been the subject of a previous investigation, the proposed new study should either furnish substantial new evidence or provide a significant new interpretation.
3. Practicality: Sources must be available which one may use conveniently and without fear of censorship. The scope of the subject should be neither too limited nor too broad.
4. Unity: Every project must have a unifying theme, or be directed to a certain question or thesis; thus there is a point of departure, the development of subject, and specific conclusions.

There are unlimited topics for study, especially at the local level. These include studies of business, churches, governments, biographies, community changes, and other topics. It must be understood, however, that any one phase may involve one or all of the social studies.

For example, the evolution of business represents one phase of economics; its impact on people involves sociology and its influence on people involves psychology. Even though the project encompasses many disciplines, it must be entered for competition in the discipline of major emphasis.

In selecting a topic, the student should exercise care regarding the scope of the project. The project topic should not be so broad that it cannot be given good in-depth treatment. Conversely, the student's topic should not be too specific. For example, a topic such as World War II may be too broad and too difficult to complete everything about that historical event in one comprehensive project. On the other hand, a topic such as Louisiana in World War II may be too narrow because information on Louisiana's involvement in the war would be too limited. A specific topic would, perhaps, be more suitable; some examples are the War in the Pacific, the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Allied invasion of Europe, the development of the atomic bomb, or the Battle of the Bulge.

It is possible that a student may be able to successfully create a project on World War II or Louisiana in World War II. The key is how the student treats the topic. A student might be able to create a project with a unique perspective on both these topics. However, great care should be given to find the middle ground between topics that are too broad and topics that are too narrow.

Once a reasonable topic is selected, a title should be given to the project. The title should be short and descriptive and create a picture of the project. It should pique the judges' curiosity and spark an interest in learning more about the project associated with the title. It may be that the best title for the project might emerge from the research, and the title could be assigned after the research is completed.

Once the topic and/or the title is selected, the student should begin research. Information can be gathered from many sources, especially school, public, or college/university libraries.

Sources of information concerning one project may require only questionnaires to a sample of people and the tabulation of results. Another project may be based on the study of manuscripts and/or newspapers and still another project may be based on government publications or those of some specialized agency. The following are fruitful sources of information for researchers in the social science:

- A. Newspapers, magazines, published letters, memos.
- B. Unpublished manuscripts (wills, letters, deeds, church minutes, diaries)
- C. Government publications (international, national, state, local)
- D. Publications by private agencies, physical remains (buildings, battle areas, artifacts)
- E. Oral interviews, polls and questionnaires, photographs, sound recordings, films

As a rule, a good researcher uses a variety of three, and the use of one leads to the use of another.

Students should consult general reference materials first if they have no background information at all or if the topic is not current. Some suggested reference sources of this type are:

- A. Encyclopedias
- B. Atlas and gazetteers
- C. Almanacs
- D. Yearbooks and handbooks
- E. Biographical dictionaries

If the information is very current, information can be found through the use of:

- A. Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature
- B. Vertical files
- C. Newspapers or news magazines
- D. Current biography

One of the most powerful tools for library research, other than the librarian, is the card catalog. This invaluable tool will allow the student to locate information according to the title of a book, subject, or author.

Another excellent, often overlooked, source is community people who can offer oral information about a wide range of topics and events. Students with appropriate topics will find these people a fine source of information which can enrich their projects with unique and often unusual information unavailable from other sources. Other information can be secured from community people in the form of questionnaires or surveys.

Social studies and other teachers with responsibilities for developing skills should not miss the opportunity to provide appropriate instruction in these areas to students working

on fair projects: reading, writing, research and reference, study, thinking, and other skills. Instruction should be coordinated with the development of social studies projects.

## **PROJECT DISPLAY**

The display is the physical representation of your theme or topic. It must fit within a space 36 inches wide and 30 inches deep. It cannot weigh over 100 pounds or be taller than 100 inches. The project may assume one of several forms:

- A. Visual projects: This type project relies primarily on visual elements to convey to the judges the meaning of the project.
- B. Audio projects: This type project relies primarily on audio elements to convey to the judges the meaning of the project.
- C. Audio-visual projects: This type project relies primarily on both audio and visual elements to convey to the judges the meaning of the project.

In all the forms, the student should still have a research paper and should be prepared to give an oral presentation to the judges.

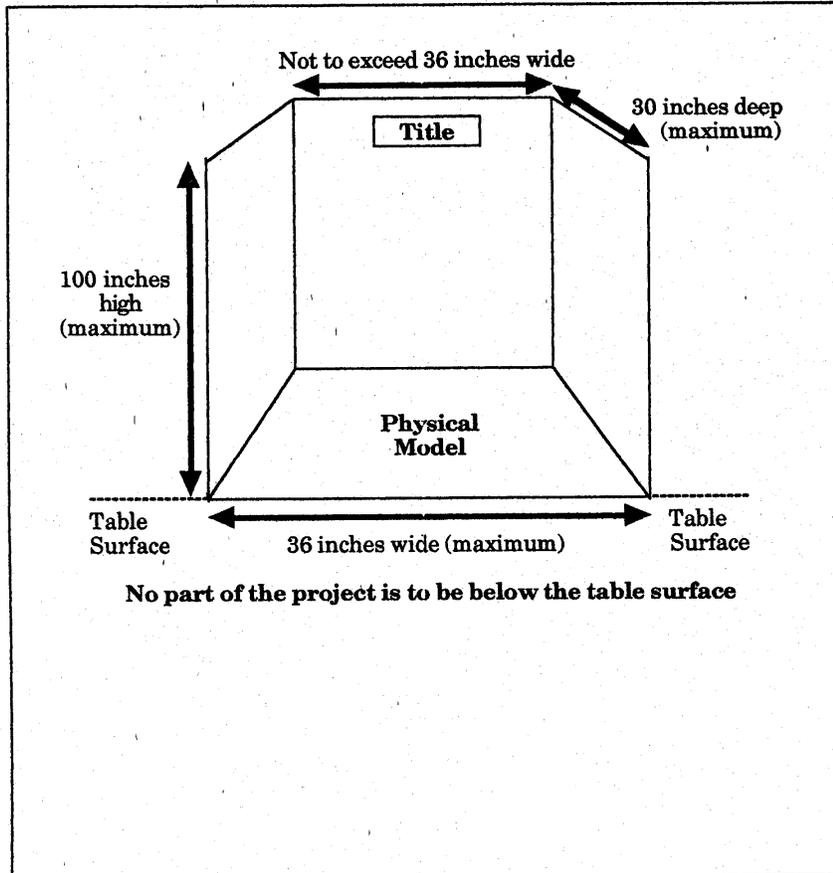
Other points to remember about the physical appearance of the project are:

- A. The title of the project must be on display.
- B. Use one color printing to avoid confusion.
- C. The materials used for the project vary, but it should be safe, strong, lightweight, and self-supporting.
- D. Use attractive materials and lettering.
- E. Words should be seen easily from a distance of three to five feet.
- F. Choose colors which have good value contrast. Value contrast is the amount of darkness or lightness in a color. For example, navy blue letters on a yellow background are easier to read than orange letters on a yellow background.  
Suggested colors are:
  - 1. White on black
  - 2. Black on yellow
  - 3. Black on orange
  - 4. Yellow on green
  - 5. Orange on purple
  - 6. White on purple
  - 7. Navy blue on yellow
  - 8. Purple on yellow
- G. Avoid the use of purchased items and little plastic figures. Be creative; make your own figures from available materials or handmade items. Use original materials or pictures where possible, and avoid the use or over use of photocopies.
- H. Do not use flammable, toxic, or other dangerous materials or objects.

Various project media can be included in the project. These include:

- A. Charts
- B. Documentaries
- C. Murals
- D. Maps
- E. Statistical analysis
- F. Diagrams
- G. Photographs
- H. Graphs
- I. Mock-up surveys

**SIZE AND WEIGHT REQUIREMENTS FOR  
SOCIAL STUDIES FAIR PROJECTS**



**Note:** Maximum weight is 100 pounds

**Note:** The title may be placed anywhere on the project. The research paper is not to be attached to the backboard. No part of the project may extend beyond the above listed measurements.

**Note:** No project may extend below the level of the table top. This includes any audio/visual equipment.

# RESEARCH PAPER

A well-developed research paper must accompany each social studies fair project. The research paper must include these items:

## 1. Title Page

Good titles usually are short, descriptive, and create pictures in the minds of the audience. A title should hint at the subject without telling the whole story like a riddle that sparks interest because it makes the listener think.

## 2. Table of Contents

All major elements in the paper should be listed with the appropriate page number.

## 3. Abstract

It is a brief (approximately 250 words) summary of the content, purpose, and reference sources used in the paper. The purpose of the report should be based on the questions you asked or the problem you identified. The following is an example of an abstract.

This project is about the internment of Japanese-American citizens during World War II. The project will describe the historical background for popular sentiment against Japanese-Americans living on the west coast of the United States at the beginning of World War II. The project will show that the internment of these people was not an act of increase national security, but was apart of a greater effort to calm an alarmed American public frightened by the sudden attack on Pearl Harbor. Further, the project will show that the internment of these American citizens was inconsistent with constitutional principles.

Information for this project was secured from various sources, including books, periodicals, and government documents. Also included with the project will be taped interviews with legal experts and Japanese-Americans.

This project intends to demonstrate that even in times of national emergency, citizens must be careful to ensure constitutional rights.

## 4. Body of Paper

This part of the paper tells the story of the project. It should include information about the basic purpose of the report, relevant questions asked, and information gathered for the research. The length of the paper may vary depending on the type of project, but it should be of adequate length to appropriately cover the topic.

## **5. Conclusion**

The general ideas the student discovered or learned from doing the project should be concisely described in this section.

## **6. Footnotes/Endnotes**

Any information (including oral interview information) directly cited in the report or paraphrased should be properly indicated in the body of the research paper. Footnotes/endnotes are required in Division III research papers.

## **7. Bibliography**

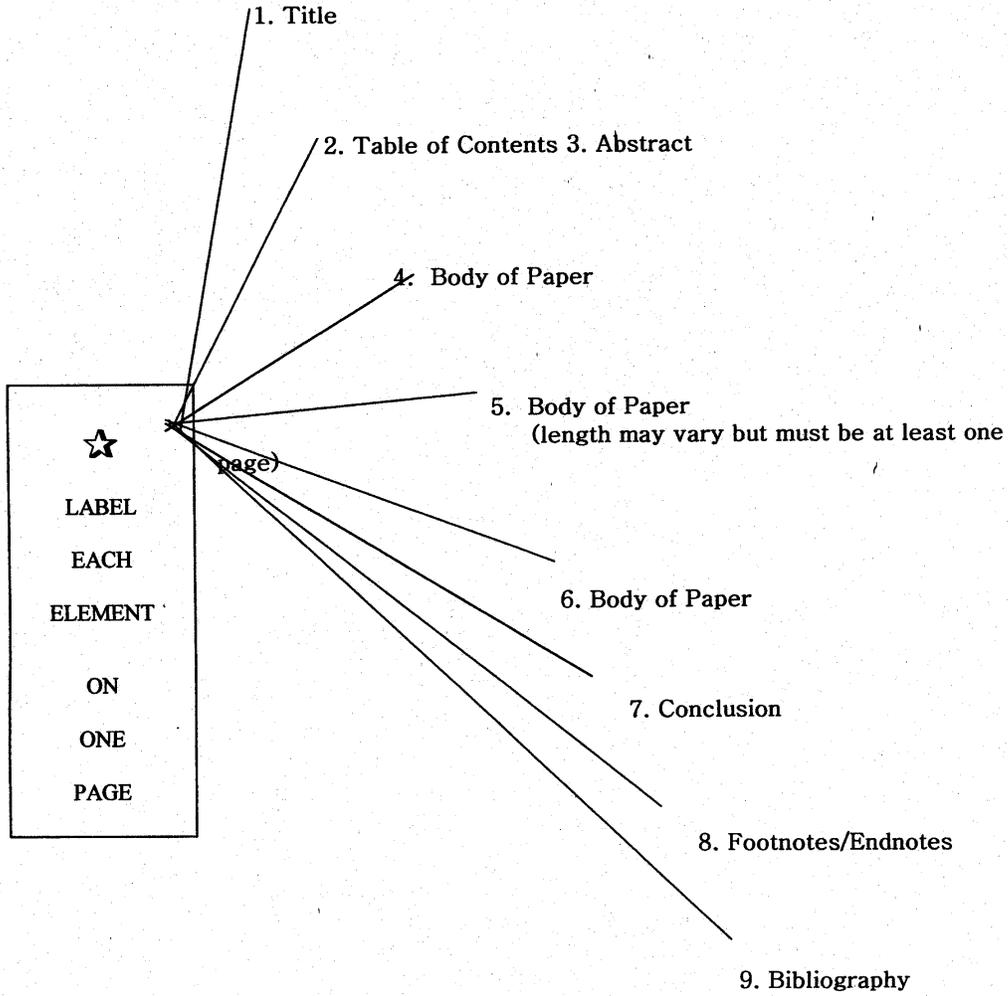
All books, articles, and other sources, included interviews, which are used in the report, must be listed. Any of the standard bibliographic or reference style such as the American Psychological Association, Turabian, University of Chicago, Modern Language Association, etc. may be used.

Each part of the research paper must be clearly labeled at the top of the appropriate page.

Regional Fair Directors are responsible for checking that these items are all included before sending to the state fair.

ELEMENTS IN A RESEARCH PAPER FOR  
A SOCIAL STUDIES FAIR PROJECT

(Label each page with the specific component)



## ORAL PRESENTATION

Each project must have one (1) student give an oral presentation to judges on their project. The student should also be prepared to respond to any questions that might be asked about the project. The oral presentation should be concise, direct, and in logical order; responses to questions should also be concise and direct. These are some things that will be beneficial in the oral presentation when responding to questions:

- A. Keep eye contact with judges.
- B. Stand on both feet.
- C. Dress neatly.
- D. Stay within the time limit.
- E. Integrate the display into the presentation.
- F. Use conversational speech.
- G. Relax, speak slowly and clearly.

There are several things that should be avoided during the oral presentation. These include:

- A. Chewing gum or tobacco.
- B. Moving nervously.
- C. Standing in front of or obscuring the project.
- D. Using note cards or notes.
- E. Putting hands in pockets.
- F. Wearing heavy jewelry or distracting clothing.

### Parent Involvement

Appropriate parent and teacher involvement in a social studies project is essential. Both parents and teachers should remember that the most important ingredients in any project is the amount of work the student accomplishes, how much knowledge he or she acquires, and how much initiative is displayed. Many abilities are developed: researching, organizing, outlining, measuring, calculating, reporting, and presenting. These involve the reading, writing, arithmetic, and social skills that are a part of successful daily living.

There are some points that both teachers and parents should keep in mind:

- A. Parents and teachers should support and encourage involvement in the social studies program.
- B. The emphasis should be on student achievement and learning and not strictly on “winning.”
- C. It is appropriate for parents and teachers to work with students to insure that projects are safe.
- D. Some forms of parental or teacher involvement which are welcomed include:
  - 1. Suggesting project ideas.
  - 2. Suggesting reference sources.

3. Transportation to libraries, businesses, museums, and other places that are sources of project information.
4. Being a good listener for practice oral presentations.
5. Offering general constructive criticisms.
6. Giving encouragement to students.
7. Monitoring construction of the project to insure safety.