

1.6 Guide to Science Fair Forms

Paperwork is undeniably the most tedious part of competing in a science fair. Failing to fill out the correct forms is the worst way to get disqualified before judging even begins. So, it is very important to know what forms you need, and how to complete them.

KEY NOTE:

You **MUST** get your paperwork approved and signed **BEFORE** you begin any testing or data collection. If you start testing on humans, animals, or with dangerous chemicals before your forms are signed and dated, you will be disqualified. There are zero exceptions to this rule.

If you are doing a project that isn't hazardous (No human validations, no chemicals, no risks), you only need to complete these:

The Core Requirements (Everyone Needs These)

No matter what your project is about, you must complete the following baseline documents:

- **Form 1 (Checklist for Adult Sponsor):** Your science teacher or mentor fills this out. It serves as proof that an adult reviewed your research plan and confirmed it is safe to proceed.
- **Form 1A (Student Checklist):** This contains your basic demographic and project information. It includes your name, school, project title, and the physical location where you will conduct the research (home, school, or a professional research institution).
- **Form 1B (Approval Form):** You and your parents or guardians must sign this document, stating that you understand the safety guidelines and ethical rules of the competition.

The Research Plan (Everyone Needs These)

This is not a fill-in-the-blank form. It is a multi-page document you must type from scratch. To pass SRC review, your Research Plan **MUST** include:

- **Rationale:** A brief synopsis of the background that supports your research problem and explains why this research is important.
- **Hypothesis, Research Question, or Engineering Goal:** What exactly are you trying to test or build?

- **Detailed Procedure:** A step-by-step methodology. It must explicitly state how you are gathering data, who/what your test subjects are, and how you will mitigate any safety risks. You must include disposal procedures if using chemicals.
- **Data Analysis:** Do not just say "I will analyze the data." State the specific statistical tests or metric comparisons you will use to evaluate your results (e.g., T-tests, ANOVA, accuracy matrices).
- **Bibliography:** A structured list of at least 5 major peer-reviewed journal articles or reference texts that guided your project.

However, if your project involves anything potentially risky or ethically sensitive, a group of adults called the Scientific Review Committee (SRC) or Institutional Review Board (IRB) must review and approve your plan before you start.

Check these descriptions to see if any of those forms are necessary for your science fair project.

Human Subjects (Form 4)

If you are surveying students, having people test a software application, or testing a physical prototype on humans (even yourself), you need IRB approval. You will also need a separate Informed Consent Form that your human test subjects must sign before participating.

Hazardous Materials & Activities (Form 3)

If you are using dangerous chemicals, firing lasers, operating heavy machinery, or handling prescription drugs, you need a Risk Assessment form. This proves you understand the specific dangers and have secured the proper protective gear and supervision.

Vertebrate Animals (Form 5A / 5B)

If you are working with mice, fish, or any animal with a backbone, the rules are extremely strict to prevent animal cruelty. You should avoid this entirely unless you are working directly in a certified, professional university lab under expert supervision.

Potentially Hazardous Biological Agents (Form 6A)

You cannot grow unknown bacteria or handle dangerous microbes at home. Period. You must conduct this research in a certified BSL-1 or BSL-2 laboratory at a school or university, and you must file this specific form to prove the lab meets safety standards.