

How is judging done?

There are many answers to that question!

Pre-judging:

The hall is opened at 10 am for judges to come in and read your boards, look through notebooks, and take an abstract.

Category Awards Judging:

A judging team of two to four judges will be assigned to each group of projects. These judges are instructed to choose first, second, and/or honorable mention awards from their group of projects. For category judging, we strive to judge projects with others in the same grade.

Category judges use the judging criteria posted on our website to select approximately 30% of the projects in their group to win category awards (so 70% of projects do not win awards).

In most cases, you will be grouped with other projects (typically 8 – 12 projects) in your grade and category.

In rare cases, a category is so unique and has such a small number of projects that we ask specialized judges to judge that category for multiple grades.

In some cases, the number of projects in a grade and category is so small, the projects will be combined into a group with similar categories. Consequently, the number of awards in categories may vary. For example: A very small category may have no first place awards, while a large category may have multiple first place awards.

Category judges wear blue ribbons.

Special Awards Judging:

Special Awards are handled by the organization sponsoring each award. The criteria for the award are determined by the sponsoring organization and they usually supply the judging team.

Some of these judging teams look at every project on the floor while others are only interested in projects having to do with one specific subject (for example: they may only want to look at projects related to water). If the topic of your project

doesn't match the criteria for their organization the judges will not stop to discuss your project with you. The judges often use the titles of the projects to determine whether a project will be reviewed.

Special Award judges wear white ribbons.

Isabelle Stone and Castro Family Awards Judging:

One project from each middle school grade is selected for the Isabelle Stone Awards (best in in Biological Sciences).
One project from each middle school grade is selected for the Castro Family (best in in Physical Sciences).

A group of 5 seasoned judges looks at all the projects in each of these six sections, chooses the winner, and ranks the other outstanding middle school projects.

Grand Prize Judging:

Grand Prize judging includes all projects in grades 9 through 12, and projects are divided into 3 groups. The two main groups are Physical Science projects and Biological Science projects. The third group is an Outreach group that Society for Science and the Public (administrators of Intel ISEF) allows us to have in addition to our two main groups; it selects projects from schools that traditionally graduate fewer STEM bound students.

Judges for these groups have either a doctorate in their field or equivalent experience, the same requirements in place for ISEF judges. Some of these judges also judge at Intel ISEF.

In addition to identifying the Grand Prize winners and the Grand Prize alternates, the Grand Prize judging teams rank the other outstanding high school projects.

California State Science Fair (CSSF) Judging:

The six projects that win the Castro Family and Isabelle Stone awards win sponsored trips to the CSSF. All the Grand Prize projects, including alternates, are qualified to participate at CSSF.

The California State Science Fair Judging team then uses the additional ranking information from the Grand Prize judging teams, from the Isabelle Stone and Castro Family Judging teams, and their own assessment of other outstanding projects to identify other candidates for the CSSF. In determining whom to select, they factor in the judging categories that the CSSF uses (which are very different from both the Synopsys Championship categories and the Intel ISEF categories).

Once the CSSF judging team selects the CSSF candidates and ranks the CSSF alternates, they verify the students have won a first or second place award in the category judging. To be a CSSF qualified candidate, the student must be both selected by the CSSF judging team and have won a first or second place category award. Winning a first place category award does not guarantee selection for CSSF as either a candidate or alternate.

Why aren't results posted immediately?

Although most of the results are entered into our database with an hour or so of judging being over, we don't post them to the website right away for a number of reasons:

- A. The main reason is we want the results to be a surprise at the awards ceremony. Occasionally deadlines for subsequent fairs prevent us from doing that, so we contact the affected students before the awards ceremony, but as much as possible, we do want it to be a surprise.
- B. Occasionally something goes wrong. Whether it is a computer crashing (so all the data has to be re-entered), a judging team leader not leaving the list of winners (so we have to contact the leader, retrieve the list, and verify with the other judges), or a group of students not getting judged (happened only once and we sent a judging team around to each student's school all over the county to judge the projects), we want to have enough time to properly correct whatever errors might occur.
- C. Some special awards teams do some secondary judging or finalize the awards they are going to give after judging day, so we don't even have the results that day.
- D. Occasionally, we (or a judging team) discover that a student's project was not really as presented and an award that was planned to be given has to be retracted - this requires consultation with the respective judging team and review of their notes to determine the next most meritorious project.

E. All of the people involved in the Synopsys Championship judging are volunteers. They spent many hours preparing for and administering the fair, and all are exhausted at the end of judging. We have found that a complete double-check of the awards data entry the following weekend is very important.

Why is there a delay before the Awards Ceremonies?

Great America is very generous in providing the venue for the ceremony and all the tickets for free entry to the park. We typically have our ceremony on the second Sunday they open the park. Historically our fair was later and closer to the award ceremony, but we have moved it forward to accommodate the earlier date of the California State Science Fair.