Judging criteria for NSA awards: guidelines and expectations – revised February 2021

In order to address a striking degree of variance in scores provided by judges for student awards in recent years, here we offer guidelines that are meant to provide judges with a standard mind-set and students with clear expectations.

Thurlow C. Nelson Award (Oral presentations)

• Professional demeanor and presentation 15 points
  - Does the presenter convey respect to his/her audience in their physical appearance?
  - Does the presenter avoid, “um”, “er”, “like, kinda”, “sorta, dude”, etc.?
  - Does the presenter try to tell a story?
  - Does the presenter project their voice to the audience (as best they can – not withstanding audio issues)?
  - Does the presenter speak clearly (accents notwithstanding)?
  - Does the presenter show enthusiasm for the subject matter?

• Use of media presentation tools 15 points
  - Is the presentation style clear and concise?
  - Is the use of words in slides judicious and precise?
  - Does the presenter use the tools well or is their delivery/use of tools distracting?
  - Is the message on the slide well conveyed?

• Organization and clarity of the presentation 15 points
  - Do you always know where you are in the presentation?
  - Was each division of the talk clear and identifiable, for example, by starting with a “topic statement”?
  - Were there adequate/competent segues among sections?
  - Is the appropriate time allocated to each segment of the talk or did they go over the time limit?

• Introduction, background 5 points
  - Was adequate background and rationale provided for an audience unfamiliar with the project/experiment?
  - Does the introduction “start the story?”

• Objectives of the research (e.g., hypothesis statement or defined end points) 5 points
  - Is it crystal clear what the experiment/study is setting out to demonstrate?
  - Is the question appropriately scaled for the available experimental approach?
  - Is the scope of work presented sufficiently concise to fit into the allotted time slot?

• Experimental/investigative approach 10 points
  - Is the design of the experiment/investigation clear?
  - Do the methods used support the question asked?
  - Is it clear that the presenter had a significant role in executing the design of the experiment?

• Results 10 points
  - Are the results conclusive (not preliminary)?
  - Was sufficient evidence presented to answer the objectives of the research?
  - Were the data statistically analyzed, where appropriate?
  - Do the statistical findings support the conclusions made?
• **Discussion and conclusions**  
  - Were alternative interpretations presented?  
  - Was the work placed in context of other related science, i.e., what have others done?  
  - Were inconsistencies in data, if any, addressed?  
  - Were limitations of conclusions adequately acknowledged?  
  - Was the “bottom line” of the project succinctly presented?  
  - Was the take-away message clear in the final analysis?  
  - Did the presenter avoid meaningless generalizations?  

• **Creativity and originality**  
  - Is there a creative edge to the presentation that makes it stand out above others?  
  - Is the research question original, stemming from a novel idea?  
  - Will the work make an impact on the field, either practical or academic?  

• **Subject knowledge and question responses**  
  - During the presentation, was it clear that the presenter was adequately familiar with the background material and rationale for the work?  
  - Did the presenter leave enough time for questions (minimum 2 minutes)?  
  - Were the presenter’s responses to questions coherent and appropriate?  

---

**Gunter Award (Poster presentations)**

• **Title**  
  - Does the title pose, or promise an answer to, a decisive question?  
  - Is the title understandable to someone in another discipline?  

• **Presentation style (design, visual impact)**  
  - Is space used judiciously?  
  - Are the font style and size easily readable from a computer screen without zooming way in?  
  - Is the style professionally rendered?  
  - Is there an aesthetic quality to colors and styles used?  

• **Presentation organization & clarity**  
  - Can the reader easily navigate the various sections in sequence?  

• **Introduction (clear and succinct)**  
  - Was adequate background and rationale provided for an audience unfamiliar with the project/experiment?  
  - Does the introduction “start the story?”  

• **Objectives of the research (e.g., hypothesis statement or defined end points)**  
  - Is it crystal clear what the experiment is setting out to demonstrate?  
  - Is the question appropriately scaled for the available experimental approach?  

• **Experimental approach**  
  - Is the design of the experiment or investigation clear?  
  - Do the methods used support the question asked?  
  - Is it clear that the presenter had a significant role in executing the design of the experiment?
• Results 10 points
  o Are the results, conclusive (not preliminary)?
  o Was sufficient evidence presented to answer the objectives of the research?
  o Were the data statistically analyzed (where appropriate)?
  o Do the statistical findings support the conclusions made?

• Discussion and conclusions 10 points
  o Were alternative interpretations presented?
  o Was the work placed in context of other related science, i.e., what have others done?
  o Were inconsistencies in data, if any, addressed?
  o Were limitations of conclusions adequately acknowledged?
  o Was the “bottom line” of the project succinctly presented?
  o Was the take-away message clear in the final analysis?
  o Did the presenter avoid meaningless generalizations?

• Creativity and originality 10 points
  o Is there a creative edge to the presentation that makes it stand out above others?
  o Is the research question original, stemming from a novel notion?

• Overall impact 5 points
  o Are the presentation and content sufficient to adequately convey the science and the message without additional input from the presenter/author?