Judging criteria for NSA awards: guidelines and expectations – revised March 2015

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**
  - 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 project their voice to the audience (as best they can)?
  - Does the presenter speak clearly (accents notwithstanding)?
  - Does the presenter show enthusiasm for the subject matter?

- **Use of media presentation tools, e.g. PowerPoint**
  - Is the presentation style clear and concise?
  - Is the use of words in slides judicious and precise?
  - Does the presenter use the remote and pointer well or is their delivery distracting?
  - Is the message on the slide visible to the audience?

- **Organization and clarity of the presentation**
  - 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, including time for at least one question?

- **Introduction, background**
  - 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/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**
  - 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**
  - Are the results conclusive (not preliminary)?
Judging criteria, page 2

- 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 distance of 3-5 feet?
- 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?
o Is the question appropriately scaled for the available experimental approach?

• **Experimental approach**  
o Is the design of the experiment or investigation clear?
o Do the methods used support the question asked?
o Is it clear that the presenter had a significant role in executing the design of the experiment?

• **Results**  
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?
o Do the statistical findings support the conclusions made?

• **Discussion and conclusions**  
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**  
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**  
o Are the presentation and content sufficient to adequately convey the science and the message without additional input from the presenter/author?