

COMMON TYPES OF COUNTY FAIR EXHIBITS

An exhibit is a two or three-dimensional object that is displayed to the public. County fairs use the terms “display” and “exhibit” interchangeably. Following is a list of the five most common types of exhibits found at a county fair: 1) collections, 2) word-based exhibits, 3) picture-based exhibits, 4) posters and 5) construction projects. We’ve added definitions and criteria that you can use to judge these exhibits. Sometimes the meanings of these terms are not clear to the exhibitor and you may need to interpret for them. If you’re in doubt about what is meant at a specific county fair, ask the department superintendent.

1. Collections

Collections to *identify* specimens or samples are common at county fairs. Examples can vary from a collection of camera lenses to a collection of cartoons, depending upon the department. Following are some common criteria and standards that you can use to judge collections in any department:

General Criteria and Standards for Judging Collections

1. Each sample should be identified correctly.
2. Collection samples should be properly mounted. The county fair will often list a required mounting size or material, such as 14x22 poster board.
3. Collection elements should be consistent throughout, i.e., exhibit should be all specimens or photographs, not a mixture of these elements.
4. Presentation should be neat. This is a must for every exhibit at the county fair. Fingerprints, rubber cement and pencil marks should be cleaned up. Exhibits should be free of stains from food, drink and other messy things. The exhibit should have been stored and transported carefully.
5. Presentation should be easy to follow. Exhibit contents should be simple, clear and logical.

2. Word-based Exhibits

This general category includes all exhibits where *words* are the primary element in an exhibit. Following are definitions for some common word-based exhibits:

1. *Accounts, observations, records, reports and stories*: detailed accounts or summaries based on exhibitor’s observations and notes. The exhibit should have a clear beginning, middle and ending. It should include information on any instruments used to gather or measure the observations, e.g., observation sheets.
2. *Checklists and guidelines*: lists or descriptions of things needed to do something, e.g., steps in processing a photo in the darkroom or manipulating a photo on the computer.
3. *Comparisons and contrasts*: exhibits that show how two or more things are alike or different. To contrast is to show just the differences between things.
4. *Diaries, journals or log books*: personal records of things that the exhibitor did, saw or thought about, kept on a regular basis over a period of time. It is not necessary that youth make entries every day, but at least periodically.
5. *Examinations, explanations, researches, reports and studies*: detailed accounts or summaries based on the exhibitor’s research or investigation. These exhibits should have a cover page; clear beginning, middle and ending; and a list of sources of information or references.
6. *Histories*: chronological records of events arranged in order of time, starting with the oldest first. The exhibitor should explain or comment on any major events in these histories.
7. *Plans*: detailed descriptions of how the youth plans to accomplish something. Exhibitors should show evidence that they wrote their plans before starting a project.

General Criteria and Standards for Judging Word-based Exhibits

1. Should have a cover page.
2. Should have a clear statement of purpose.
3. Should be neat and legible, with correct spelling and grammar.
4. Should be easy to follow, with clear titles, subtitles, introductions and summaries.
5. Information should be correct.
6. Should contain developmentally-appropriate amount of detail, i.e., expect more from

someone in 10th grade than someone in 3rd grade.

7. Should have some photographs, pictures or other visuals to help clarify information and add interest.
8. Should have a listing of references for more extensive studies.

3. Picture-based Exhibits

This category includes all exhibits where pictures are the *main* element in an exhibit. A “picture” is a visual representation or image that is painted, drawn, photographed or otherwise rendered on a flat surface. A picture can be created by hand, or through another medium, such as a camera or computer.

Following are definitions for some common picture-based exhibits:

1. *Art, drawings, illustrations and sketches*: portrayals or reproductions to help explain, clarify or show something. A sketch is a hasty or rough drawing made as a preliminary study, while the others are meant to be more finished exhibits.
2. *Charts*: information in the form of graphs or tables.
3. *Cutouts*: pictures and articles that have been cut out of newspapers or magazines. Cutouts are often used in conjunction with other exhibits, such as reports or scrapbooks, though sometimes a fair class calls just for cutouts.
4. *Diagrams and schematics*: pictures that show the structure or process of something. These are handy tools to show how things work and how things are connected.
5. *Maps*: pictures that represent or show areas or regions.
6. *Photographs*: images that are recorded by a camera and reproduced on photographic paper. Sometimes when a county fair class calls for a “picture,” it means a photograph. Videos are sometimes an option in county fair classes calling for a photograph.
7. *Scrapbooks*: bound books in which you mount and preserve pictures or other mementos on the blank pages.

General Criteria and Standards for Judging Picture-based Exhibits

1. Good composition of individual pictures:
 - Subject fills most of the picture area.

- Background is simple and uncluttered and does not distract from the subject.

2. Storytelling ability:

- Each picture has a central idea or theme shown simply and clearly.
- The pictures as a group tell a single story. The story has a clear beginning, middle and ending arranged in logical order. Pictures show only the things that are necessary to tell the story.

3. Technical quality:

- Each picture shows satisfactory detail in all areas important to the message.
- The subject in each picture is in sharp focus, unless meant to show action.
- The subject in each picture is separated in tonal value from its background, i.e., the subject contrasts with the background so it is easy to see the subject.
- Pictures are free of faults, such as extraneous marks, smudges, stains, creases, irregular edges or poor color balance.

4. Mounting:

- Exhibit is well designed, clean, simple, structurally sound and pleasing to look at.
- Pictures are mounted and matted neatly according to the requirements of the county fair.
- Pictures are mounted parallel to the sides of the mounting board, not placed at distracting angles on the page or mounting board.
- Layout is balanced on the board, with an adequate border.
- Pictures are arranged so that viewer eyes move from left to right, top to bottom.
- The main title attracts your attention and tells what the exhibit is about.
- Any captions say something extra, not just repeat what is obvious in the pictures.
- Lettering is neat, kept to a minimum, and large enough to be seen. Ink colors are limited to one or two bold colors.

4. Posters

A poster is a combination of words and pictures. It is defined as a special kind of sign designed to convince people to take action or to give them important information. For more information on posters, check with your county 4-H office for a copy of 4H23, *Say it with Posters*.

General Criteria and Standards for Judging Posters

1. The exhibit should be neat, clean, the proper size and on the proper color of poster board. Standard board sizes are 11 x 14, 14 x 22 and 22 x 28. Because of limited exhibit space, many county fairs limit the size of posters. A fair also may limit the color of poster board to white or some other color. If color boards are allowed, encourage exhibitors to select colors that do not detract from or overpower the words and pictures. Safe colors are off-white, gray and light tan.
2. The poster should have a single, clearly expressed idea. It is most effective when urging people to take some action.
3. At least 50% of the poster should have original work, not just cutouts or popular cartoon characters.
4. The poster should be well designed, with an effective balance of art, lettering and blank or white space. Good use should be made of the entire exhibit space. It should not be too crowded or too empty. The exhibit should be dominated by one or two bold colors used effectively. There should be an adequate border.
5. The poster should have one dominant, eye-catching picture or piece of art that is at least one-third the size of the entire exhibit space and significantly larger than other exhibit elements. Any other art should not be too small to be effective.
6. Words should be kept to a minimum and spelled correctly. The main title should attract your attention and tell you what the exhibit is about. Information generally should be arranged so that your eye moves from left to right, top to bottom. There should be no clichés, e.g., overused expressions from TV commercials and popular shows. Lettering should be plain, simple, large and with enough contrast to be easy to read from a distance.
7. Elements should be neatly and properly mounted according to the requirements of the county fair. Mounting material will vary with the exhibit. Rubber cement, for example, is a good adhesive for temporary mounting and it cleans up easily. Glue sticks, double-stick tape, spray glues and dry-mounting tissues are other possibilities.

8. There should be no pencil marks, excess rubber cement, fingerprints or dirt on the exhibit.

5. Construction Projects

Construction projects are three-dimensional displays built by the exhibitor. The materials used in the construction will vary with the class and lot. Obviously, there are many potential types of construction projects at a county fair. Following are definitions for some common types:

1. *Artifacts*: objects that are made by people.
2. *Cutaways*: objects that have been cut into parts so observers can see their contents.
3. *Dioramas*: three-dimensional miniature scenes with painted modeled figures and backgrounds.
4. *Mobiles*: types of hanging sculptures with parts moved by air currents.
5. *Models, mockups and scale models*: models are small objects that represent larger objects. A scale model is a model of an object drawn to scale or proportion, commonly 1:12 (1 in. equals 12 in.). A mockup is a full-sized scale model of an object.

General Criteria and Standards for Judging Construction Projects

1. Creativity and originality
2. Appearance
3. Workmanship
 - Quality of construction should be appropriate for the exhibitor's grade in school and development and in proportion to the amount of help he or she received.
 - Item should be made of appropriate materials and never of toxic or hazardous materials.
 - Item should be durable.
 - Item made from "scratch" should be rated higher than an item made from a purchased kit.
4. Usefulness
 - Item should have clear information on what it is and clear directions on how it is to be used.
 - If the item is meant to work, it should work when you evaluate it.
5. There should be no unsafe display techniques.

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