The Display

Your science fair display represents all the work that you have done. It should consist of a backboard, the project report, and anything that represents your project, such as models made, items studied, photographs, surveys, and the like. It must tell the story of the project in such a way that it attracts and holds the interest of the viewer. It has to be thorough, but not too crowded, so keep it simple.

The allowable size and shape of the display backboard can vary, so you will have to check the rules for your science fair. Most exhibits are allowed to be 48 inches (122 cm) wide, 30 inches (76 cm) deep, and 108 inches (274 cm) high (including the table it stands on). These are maximum measurements, so your display may be smaller than this. A three-sided backboard is usually the best way to display your work. Sturdy cardboard can be used, but heavier material is easier to work with and is less likely to be damaged during transportation to the fair. Wooden panels can be cut and hinged together. Some office supply stores sell inexpensive premade backboards. If these are not available in your area, see Appendix C for science supply companies from which you can order inexpensive pre-made backboards.

The title and other headings should be neat and large enough to be read at a distance of about 3 feet (1 m). A short title is often eye-catching. Make an effort to use six to ten words with a maximum of 50 characters in the title. Precut letters for the title and headings can be bought and glued to the backboard, or you can cut your own letters out of construction paper. You could also stencil the letters for all the titles directly on the backboard. Self-sticking letters, of various sizes and colors, can be purchased at office supply stores. You can even use a word processor to print the title and other headings.

Some teachers have set rules about the position of the information on the backboard. The following headings are examples: Problem, Hypothesis, Procedure, Data, Results, and Conclusion. The project title should go at the top of the center panel, and the remaining material needs to be placed neatly in some order. Figure 8.1 shows one way of placing the material. The heading "Next Time," though not always required, may be included if desired. It would follow the conclusion and contain a brief description of plans for future development of the project. This information
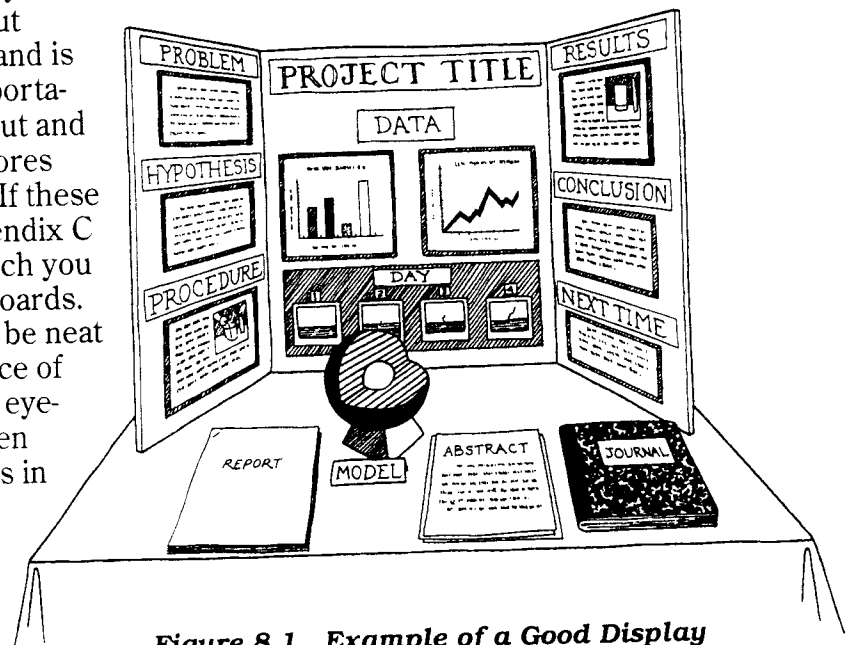

Figure 8.1   Example of a Good Display

could be included in the conclusion, rather than under a separate heading.

You want a display that the judges will remember positively. So before you glue everything down, lay the board on a flat surface and arrange the materials a few different ways. This will help you decide on the most suitable and attractive presentation. Figure 8.1 shows what a good display might look like.

HELPFUL HINTS

1. Before standing your backboard on the display table, cover the table with a colored cloth. Choose a color that matches the color scheme of the backboard. This will help to separate your project from other projects displayed on either side.

2. Place all typed material on a colored backing, such as construction paper. Leave a border of about ¼ to ½ inch (0.63 to 1.25 cm) around the edges of each piece of typed material. Use a paper cutter so that the edges will be straight.

3. Make the project title stand out by using larger letters for it and smaller letters for the headings.

4. To arrange the letters on the backboard, first lay the letters out on the board without attaching them. Then, use a yardstick (meterstick) and pencil to draw a straight, light guideline where the bottom of each letter should line up. This will help you keep the lettering straight. Before adhering everything, ask the opinion of other students, teachers, or family members.

5. If you need electricity for your project, be sure the wiring meets all safety standards.

6. Bring an emergency kit with extra letters, glue, tape, construction paper the color of the backboard, stapler, scissors, pencils, pens, touch-up paint, markers, and so forth. This kit should contain anything that you think you might need to make last-minute repairs to the display.

DO'S AND DON'TS

Do use computer-generated graphs.

Do display photos representing the procedure and the results.

Do use contrasting colors.

Do limit the number of colors used.

Do display models when applicable. If possible, make the models match the color scheme of the backboard.

Do attach charts neatly. If there are many, place them on top of each other so that the top chart can be lifted to reveal the ones below.

Do balance the arrangement of materials on the backboard. This means to evenly distribute the materials on the board so that they cover about the same amount of space on each panel.

Do use rubber cement or double-sided tape to attach papers. White school glue causes the paper to wrinkle.

Don't leave large empty spaces on the backboard.

Don't leave the table in front of the backboard empty. Display your models (if any), report, copies of your abstract, and your journal here.

Don't hang electrical equipment on the backboard so that the electric cord runs down the front of the backboard.

Don't make the title or headings hard to read by using uneven lettering, words with letters of different colors, or disorganized placement of materials.

Don't hand-print the letters on the backboard.

Don't attach folders that fall open on the backboard.

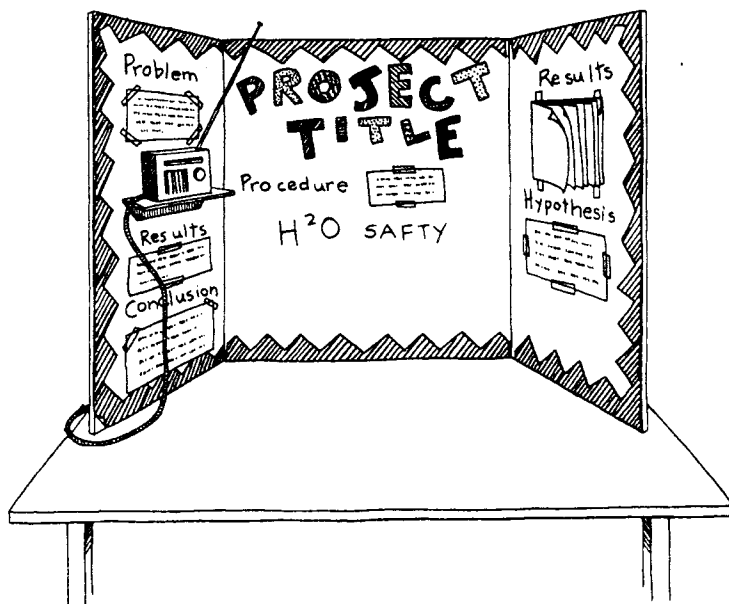**Don't** make mistakes in spelling words or writing formulas.

Figure 8.2   Example of a Bad Display

Figure 8.2 shows how *not* to set up your display.

SAFETY

Basically, anything that is or could be hazardous to other students or the public is *prohibited* and cannot be displayed. The following is a list of things that are generally unacceptable for display. Your teacher has access to a complete list of safety rules from your local science-fair officials. Your project topic should be approved by your teacher before beginning.

This prevents you from working on an unsafe project and from wasting time on a project that would be disqualified. Models or photographs can be used instead of things that are restricted from display.

Unacceptable for Display

1. Live animals

2. Microbial cultures or fungi, living or dead

3. Animal or human parts, except for teeth, hair, nails, and dried animal bones

4. Liquids, including water

5. Chemicals and/or their empty containers, including caustics, acids, and household cleaners

6. Open or concealed flames

7. Batteries with open-top cells

8. Combustible materials

9. Aerosol cans of household solvents

10. Controlled substances, poisons, or drugs

11. Any equipment or device that would be hazardous to the public

12. Sharp items, such as syringes, knives, and needles

13. Gases