

## **2025-2026 New Jersey Science Research Symposium Core Rules of Competition**



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## **About the Competition**

The New Jersey Science Research Symposium (NJSRS) is a new STEM fair for NJ high school students that will provide an opportunity for high school researchers in the state to deliver presentations in front of a panel of judges and an audience and compete for awards. The format will be similar to that used in the now-defunct Junior Science and Humanities Symposium (JSHS) oral presentation competition. There will also be a poster session in the afternoon, for all participants, in which they will share their research and compete for special awards. Students will qualify for participation in NJSRS by submitting a 5-20 page research report—a shorter version of the 5-40 page research report required by JSHS. Top projects will be selected in a preliminary round of judging. Only those projects selected in this preliminary round of judging will present their research at the symposium.

## **Eligibility**

1. Every participating student must be a resident of New Jersey and must be enrolled in a New Jersey High School (public or private).
2. Students must have a teacher or administrator from their school who will attend the fair. This does not have to be a science teacher. The teacher or administrator must verify that the student's project was done safely and ethically. The teacher or administrator will also collect student entry fees. Each school will mail a single check covering the entry fees for all of their participating students to Millburn High School.
3. Students can present findings on work conducted as part of a summer research project, a class project, or as a science fair project.
4. Research projects must have been conducted in the past 12 months before the fair.
5. The research presented must be an experimental project.
6. Team projects are acceptable. There will be a maximum of two people per team. Both team members must be present and must both contribute to the oral presentation and poster session presentation. The criteria used to judge NJSRS presentations will apply to both participants. Teams with three or more members are ineligible to participate.
7. For team projects, monetary awards will be split.
8. If a student is not present at the assigned time to make his/her presentation, the student risks disqualification from the competition.

Students who would like to apply to JSHS must use the fair registration link available on the NJSRS website to submit all necessary resources as part of their submission. At registration time (by 3/2/2026), students must be prepared to:

- Submit a 5-20 page written report of the research they will be presenting for further review by our judging panel. The deadline for submitting the written report is 3/23/2026.
- Complete the online registration with all application materials through the NJSRS website by the submission deadline ensuring compliance with policies for any written reports and presentations.

All written materials and presentations should reflect the student's original research and experimental processes. Any assistance acquired from teachers, research mentors, parents, or peers may be permitted. However, students should clearly define their role in the completion of their project and they must show a high level of understanding of the research results.

## **Schedule and Deadlines**

All eligible high school students are invited to apply to the New Jersey Science Research Symposium. Both students and teachers are encouraged to explore the NJSRS website for further details and submission deadlines.

**February 1, 2026** NJSRS registration opens

**March 2, 2026** NJSRS registration deadline

**March 23, 2026** NJSRS written report deadline

**March 23, 2026** NJSRS Statement of Outside Assistance form submission deadline

**April 13, 2026** NJSRS presentation slides deadline (Google Slides only)

**April 18, 2026** NJSRS held (in-person event)

## **Core Rules and Guidelines for NJSRS Submissions**

Students apply to NJSRS by completing the online registration form at [njsrs.org](http://njsrs.org) and submitting a written report that details their research investigation. Students must also submit a Statement of Outside Assistance form. Additional information may be requested upon registration.

To register for NJSRS, students will need a teacher at their high school to register for and attend the fair. All the students participating in NJSRS from the same high school must use the same teacher as their designated research advisor. The entry fee for all of the students from a school will be collected by a teacher at that school. NJSRS will invoice the teacher's school. The teacher's school will write a single purchase order (check) for all of the entry fees for the students participating from that school, and mail it to **Millburn High School at 462 Millburn Ave, Millburn NJ, 07041**.

## **Categories for NJSRS**

Assignment of a project to a category will depend on the range of projects submitted. JSHS and ISEF categories and subcategories (Animal Sciences, Biomedical Engineering, etc.) will be used as a basis for creating categories. Where needed, custom categories may be created. For example, if there are a large number of Computational Biology projects that make extensive use of statistics, they may be assigned to a "Biostatistics" subcategory and if a large number of Computational Biology projects make use of machine learning methods to detect cancer, they may be assigned to a "Computational Oncology" subcategory.

## Fair Entry Process

- Students from a NJ high school find a teacher at their school willing to attend NJSRS.
- **If the teacher/research advisor is not able to attend the fair, they must appoint a chaperone from their school faculty to supervise the students on fair day.**
- The teacher from that NJ high school registers at [njsrs.org](http://njsrs.org) as the teacher/research advisor, by 3/2/26.
- The students from that NJ high school register at [njsrs.org](http://njsrs.org) after the teacher has registered, by 3/2/26.
- The students submit their 5-20 page research papers by 3/23/26.
- The students submit their Statements of Outside Assistance by 3/23/26.
- Preliminary judging occurs, in which the top projects are selected in each category.
- The projects that are selected in the preliminary judging will attend the fair and will need to pay the \$30 entry fee. They will bring their payment to the teacher/school.
- NJSRS (through Millburn HS) will invoice the participants' school for only those students whose projects were selected.
- The participants' school will generate a purchase order (check) to send to the NJSRS host school (Millburn HS).
- Any student whose project was not selected will not need to pay the \$30 entry fee but he/she is invited to attend NJSRS as a guest attendee (not a presenter).

## **Research Paper**

The preliminary round of judging involves the evaluation of the 5-20 page written research reports for the judging panel to determine students who will be participating in-person at the fair. These selected students will be invited to present their research through an oral competition and category judging. Judges will use the JSHS Oral Judging Rubric to aid them in making their selections. Selected entries will represent the highest level of research endeavors in our region based on laboratory research, applied research, or field research.

### **Requirements**

- Use APA style student format.
  - For help with APA format, see the [Purdue OWL website](#).
- The paper should be a minimum of 5 pages long and a maximum of 20 pages long, double-spaced, including abstract, figures, and references page(s), and optional appendices, but not including the title page and not including the acknowledgements page.
- Times New Roman font
- Font size 12
- 1 inch margins
- Please include a heading for each section of your research paper, except the title page. MANDATORY sections:
  - Title page stating title of project only (not included in 20-page limit)
    - **Do NOT put the student's name or the name of the student's high school on the title page.**
  - Acknowledgement of assistance received (not included in 20-page limit)
    - **Do NOT state the name of your high school in the Acknowledgements section.**
    - **Do NOT use the name of your teacher/research advisor at your high school.**
    - **Acknowledge the contribution of this person but do not name him/her.**
    - **Do NOT include the name of external mentors nor their institutions.**
      - **Acknowledge the contribution of this person but do not name him/her.**
      - **For example: "I would like to gratefully acknowledge the assistance I received from my research advisor at my high school, who introduced me to the processes of scientific**

**research, helped me develop a research topic, and helped me to develop my presentation. I would also like to thank my research mentor who spent many hours with me discussing my research project, aiding me in the development of a scientific research question, helped me to perform my experimentation, and helped me to analyze my results. I would also like to thank several of the doctoral and post-doctoral students in her lab who helped me run my Western-blot assays, my gas chromatography-mass spectrophotometry experiments, and my PCR experiments. I would also like to thank my parents who supported me throughout the research process.”**

- Abstract (*Separate page, 250-word maximum*)
- Introduction
- Methods and materials
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendices, if needed, but these count toward 20-page limit
  
- All figures (graphs, charts, photos, diagrams, etc.) and tables must have appropriate labels (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.), titles, and captions, in [APA format](#).
- **The authorship of each figure and table must be included in each caption.**
  - If the figure or table was created by the author, please note that in the caption and state what software was used.
    - For example: “Figure created by author, using Canva.”
  - If the figure or table was created by an external source (only allowed in the Introduction section), please note that in the caption and cite the source.
    - Example #1:
      - Published by Alexander [7] where [7] refers to an entry in your References list
    - Example #2:
      - Published by Alexander (1979, p. 170) where Alexander (1979, p. 170) refers to an entry in your

*References list***■ Example #3:**

- Source: Alexander, R. M. (1979). Mechanics of running of the ostrich (*Struthio camelus*). *Journal of Zoology*, 187(2), 170.
- **A figure or table from an external source may only appear in your Introduction section. You may not use figures or tables from an external source in any other section of your paper. All figures and tables outside of the Introduction section must be of the author's own creation and must be cited as such.**

***Plagiarism***

All research papers, slide presentations, and posters submitted to NJSRS and presented at NJSRS must be the original work of the students. It is generally acceptable to mention the published work of others or to quote others, but there must be adequate and accurate citations and there must be a complete References section at the end of the research paper, the presentation slides, and the poster with complete references, in APA format.

If you do not obtain permission first in writing, it is unacceptable to mention the unpublished work of others or the published work of others who explicitly state that they require you to obtain permission before mentioning or quoting their work. Do not submit trademarked material without the written permission of the owner(s) of the trademarked materials. If NJSRS requests a copy of the written permission, the student must provide it.

***AI Statement***

For the New Jersey Science Research Symposium (NJSRS), students may use AI tools in a limited and ethical manner to support their research. AI can be used for brainstorming, limited coding help, data organization, or editing for clarity, but not to generate research ideas, fabricate data, design experiments independently, or write the research report, create the presentation slides, or create the poster. Students must maintain full ownership and understanding of all work submitted and be able to explain and justify every part of their project. Any use of AI in the project and the research submission should follow academic integrity standards and be disclosed. The use of AI is not permitted if it confers an unfair competitive advantage or misrepresents student work.

## **Statement of Outside Assistance**

All students entering NJSRS must complete and submit a signed and dated NJSRS Statement of Outside Assistance form. Students will use this form to disclose support that they received from others in their research. It will also be used to confirm that the student used safe and ethical practices when conducting animal research, human research, or research involving hazardous substances, such as potentially hazardous biological agents or chemicals.

## **Guidelines on projects involving vertebrates**

Any research that involves vertebrate animals or human participants must be carried out under the direct supervision of a qualified teacher or mentor who has an approved research protocol that follows all local, state, and federal regulations

1. Only animals obtained legally may be used, and their care and use must fully comply with all applicable state and local laws.
2. Animals must be treated humanely at all times, provided with proper nutrition, and kept in clean, safe living conditions.
3. Invasive procedures such as surgery, injections, or blood collection are strictly prohibited.
4. Any research involving animals must be supervised by a committee familiar with the laws and ethical standards governing animal research.
5. A student may not cause harm to a vertebrate animal during the research process.
6. In addition to the Statement of Outside Assistance, on a case-by-case basis, NJSRS may require students to provide additional documentation, such as a letter from a mentor or an Institutional Review Board (IRB), stating that the student's research met all appropriate regulations and standards.

## **Guidelines on projects involving human subjects**

1. Projects may not involve giving participants drugs, food, or beverages to study their effects.
2. Studies examining the effects of exercise are permitted only if participants have a valid physical examination on record and the activity is not excessive.
3. Informed consent must be obtained for any project that includes surveys or questionnaires.
4. Culturing human microorganisms is not allowed.
5. Commercially purchased tissue cultures from approved biological suppliers are acceptable.
6. Human blood used in research must be obtained from a blood bank, hospital, laboratory, or commercial source. Blood may not be drawn specifically for a science project, though previously collected medical data may be used.
7. All research involving human participants must be supervised. If the research is conducted in a non-regulated setting, such as a high school, a review committee

- of qualified teachers, administrators, mentors, and/or health personnel should evaluate and approve the research plan before the study begins.
8. In addition to the Statement of Outside Assistance, on a case-by-case basis, NJSRS may require students to provide additional documentation, such as a letter from a mentor or an Institutional Review Board (IRB), stating that the student's research met all appropriate regulations and standards.

## **Requirements for Oral Presentations**

### ***Oral Presentation Timing***

On fair day, during the first round of judging, students will deliver 10-minute presentations as they compete for the top spot in their category. In the final round of judging, held later that day, category winners will again deliver their 10-minute presentations, this time in front of the entire assembly, as they compete for the grand prize.

During the morning category qualifiers, oral presentations will be limited to 10 minutes, followed by a question and answer (Q & A) session. Presenters must stop speaking at the 10-minute mark, even if the presentation is not complete. The Q & A session will be broken into two parts. The first Q & A session will be for judges only and will last approximately 5 minutes. The second Q & A session will be for the rest of the audience only and will last for approximately 3 minutes. A session moderator will help manage time and facilitate questions. Only members of the judging panel may ask questions during the first Q & A session, after the presentation. Only audience members are allowed to ask questions in the second Q & A session. If a presenter does not reach all slides within the 10-minute presentation time limit, the presenter may not refer to those slides during the question-and-answer periods.

During the second round of oral presentations, in the afternoon session, oral presentations will again be limited to 10 minutes. Presenters must stop speaking at the 10-minute mark, even if the presentation is not complete. There will be a Q & A session for judges in this round. There will be no questions from the audience allowed in this final round of oral presentations. If a presenter does not reach all slides within the 10-minute presentation time limit, the presenter may not refer to those slides during the question-and-answer periods.

Presenters may not bring physical materials, prototypes, or supporting items with them to their oral presentations. All information must be presented exclusively on the slides. In order to prevent the judges from applying a bias for a particular school, presenters must not reveal the name of their high school and should avoid wearing any identifying clothing such as school spiritwear, letterman jackets, or school ties to the event.

### ***Oral Presentation Judging***

In both rounds of the NJSRS Oral Presentation Competition, judges will use the JSHS Oral Judging Rubric as the basis for their evaluation of the presentations. Judges will also be encouraged to meet to discuss the presentations with one another in order to come up with a final ranking. There will be no ties. There will only be one 1st place winner in each category. If we have at least 50 participants, there will also be only one 2nd place winner in each category. If we have at least 60 participants, there will also be only one 3rd place winner in each category. After the final round of judging, there will

be only one 1st place grand prize winner (\$1000 prize), one 2nd place winner, and one 3rd place winner.

### ***Google Slides Presentation Guidance***

- Use size 16 font or larger for text. You may use size 12 font for figure and table captions.
- There is no limit to the number of slides you may include in your presentation.
- Include a Title slide
  - **Include student name(s)**
  - **Do NOT put high school name on title slide and do not mention it during the presentation.**
- Include References slide(s)
- The organization of the presentation is up to the student. However, it is suggested that the presentation follows the overall structure of the research report:
  - Introduction
  - Methods and materials
  - Results
  - Discussion
  - Conclusion
- You may include additional slides to support the Q & A session, but you may only refer to them during the Q & A session if you refer to them during the presentation.
- Embed any videos or external presentation content directly into the Google Slides file.
- Share the presentation using a link on the submission and set editor permissions to “Anyone with a link can edit”.
- We prefer the use of APA format for references.

### ***Video Use Requirements***

1. Videos should only be included by students who wish to show a demonstration of a physical model or product that the student produced in their research.
2. Video content may not exceed one minute.
3. No background music is allowed.
4. Pre-recorded or computer-generated narration is not permitted; all explanations must be given live by the presenter.
5. Videos and audio may only be used to show elements that cannot be effectively presented on slides alone.
6. Video content must represent work performed by the student and support the research findings.
7. Videos may not be used to demonstrate routine procedures, showcase laboratory equipment, or display laboratory spaces.
8. Videos should not be included for visual appeal or entertainment purposes.
9. You are not permitted to use QR Codes or links to other information not in the slides.

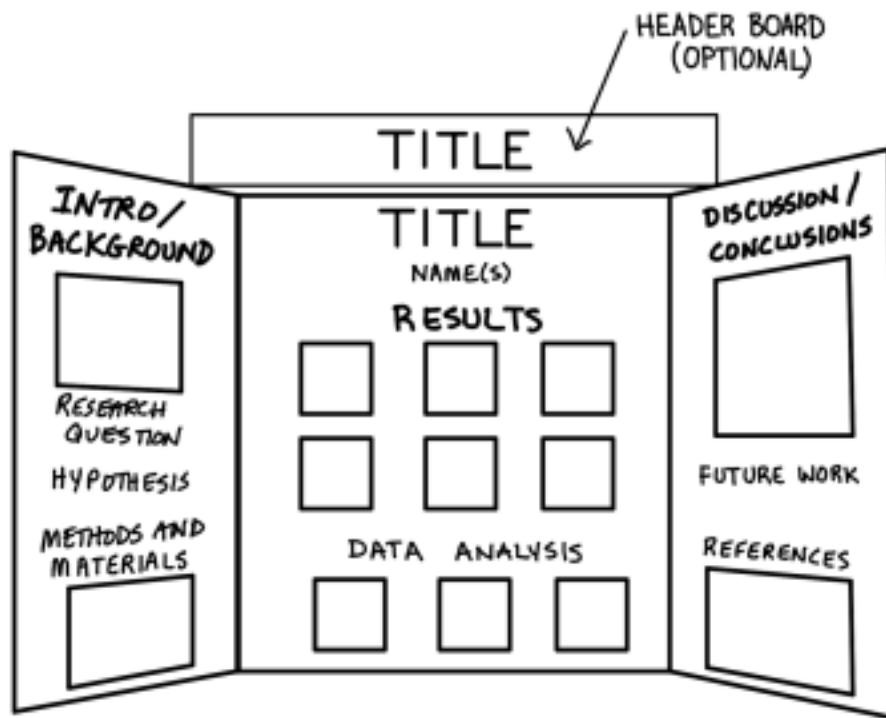
## **Poster Presentations**

The poster session will provide an opportunity for students to interact with judges, audience members, and each other to discuss their research in a less formal setting than the long-form oral presentations. Ideally, poster presentations will be short and posters will be engaging. This will encourage productive discussion.

### ***Requirements for Poster Presentations***

- Students will give a short version (5 minutes long) of their research to judges or others followed by a 2 minute Q&A period.
- You may use the same poster that you used for another competition, such as this year's TNJSF or NJAS, as long as it meets all of the following criteria.
- Use a tri-fold poster with a maximum width of 48 inches and a maximum height of 78 inches.
  - The suggested size is 48" wide x 36" high.
- Use font size 72 (1 inch) or larger for the title
  - For the rest of the poster, use a font size large enough that someone can read it from a distance of four feet away
- A header board may be used for the poster title (and nothing else), but it is not required
  - maximum size of header board = 10" x 36"
- Include the student's name (or names) but **NOT the high school name**.
- If research was performed at an outside institution, mention that, but do not mention the name of the institution.
- **Do not mention the name of the mentor or research advisor on the poster.**
- Tables will be provided to place tri-fold posters on.
- Limit the amount of text - It's OK to use bullet points
- Emphasize graphical display of information (photos, graphs, tables, etc.)

### *General Poster Layout*



- The poster will reflect the information in the research report in a more graphical format.
- Include the following sections on your poster:
  - Title
    - **Do put student name but do NOT put name of high school under title**
  - Introduction (or “Background” or “Introduction/Background”)
  - Research Question (or “Hypothesis” or “Engineering Design”)
    - OK to have BOTH a Research Question and a Hypothesis (or Engineering Design)
  - Methods/Procedures (or “Methods” or “Methods & Materials”)
  - Results
  - Discussion/Conclusions (or “Discussion” or “Conclusions”)
  - Future Work (optional—may be part of Discussion)
  - References
  - Do NOT include Abstract on poster
    - You may print out your abstract and display it on the table (optional)
- All figures (graphs, charts, photos, diagrams, etc.) and tables must have appropriate labels (Figure 1, Figure 2, etc.), titles, and captions, in APA format.
- **The authorship of each figure and table must be included in each caption.**
  - If the figure or table was created by the author, please note that in the caption and state what software was used.

- For example: “Figure created by author, using Canva.”
- If the figure or table was created by an external source (only allowed in the Introduction section), please note that in the caption and cite the source.
  - Example #1: Published by Alexander [7] where [7] refers to an entry in your References list
  - Example #2: Published by Alexander (1979, p. 170) where Alexander (1979, p. 170) refers to an entry in your References list
  - Example #3: Source: Alexander, R. M. (1979). Mechanics of running of the ostrich (*Struthio camelus*). *Journal of Zoology*, 187(2), 170.
- A figure or table from an external source may only appear in your Introduction/Background section. You may not use figures or tables from an external source in any other section of your paper. All figures and tables outside of the Introduction section must be of the author’s own creation and must be cited as such.
- Students may bring in models, laptops, logbooks, and/or other materials or devices related to their research to help demonstrate or explain their research
  - No hazardous materials are allowed
  - No biological specimens are allowed
  - On fair day NJSRS Fair Committee members must approve any/all display items

### ***Poster Session Judging***

There will not be formal category awards for the poster session. Instead, students participating in the poster session will have the opportunity to win one or more Special Awards. Special Awards judges will be encouraged to consider the JSHS Poster Judging Rubric in their assessments of the posters. However, the special awards judges are not required to follow the judging rubric rigidly and they may place a heavier weight on one element of the project and its presentation than other judges when making their decisions. For example, a special award given in honor of a family member who has died from leukemia might place a higher weight on the Results portion of a poster having to do with a potential cure for that disease. The decision about which projects will receive these special awards will be left solely to the judges. Special Awards judges may be laypeople, not necessarily professional scientists and engineers.

**Schedule - Saturday, April 18th, 2026**

**8:00 - 8:30 AM** - Check-in and set-up for participants and judges

**8:30 AM - 12:00 PM** – Category judging in classrooms

**12:00 – 1:00 PM** – Lunch for students

- First place category winners will be announced at the end of the lunch period; these will be the candidates for the NJSRS Grand Prize. Finalists must proceed to the auditorium for their presentations by 1:00 PM.

**1:00 – 3:30 PM** – Finals for category winners (Located in the auditorium)

- During this time, finalists for the grand prize will be presenting their 10-minute oral presentations in the auditorium. **Participants are highly encouraged to attend these presentations.** Special award judges will be conducting their initial reviews of posters during this time, so participants will **not** be allowed into the area where their posters are located.

**3:45 – 5:00 PM** – Poster Session for Special Award Judging

- During this time, participants will be at their posters, and judges for **special awards** will go to their shortlisted candidates and ask them to present a short version of their project (~3-5 minutes), or simply ask additional questions as they see fit.

**5:00 – 5:30 PM** – Final deliberation for winners of special awards and award printing

**5:30 PM - 6:30 PM** - Awards ceremony and closing remarks (Auditorium)