



THE UNIVERSITY OF
TENNESSEE
KNOXVILLE



PRE-COLLEGE RESEARCH
EXCELLENCE PROGRAMS

Helping Students Choose a Science Fair Question

Student Voice and Choice—The best science fair projects are a result of students’ natural curiosity about the world around them. Encourage students to choose a topic that is of personal interest. Most students will access the Internet to look for a project that interests them, but be sure they understand that projects that have been done many times have also been seen many times by the judges. Judges like to see unique topics or at least unique twists on projects. Insist that your students have some aspect of their project that is original and unique, not just copied from the Internet.

Is it a Testable Question?—Some topics lend themselves to research papers but not to scientific investigations. A topic like “what makes plants grow?” is a question based in science, but is not specific enough to make a good science fair question. A testable question related to the overall topic of “what makes plants grow” might be “What factors positively affect the growth of lettuce in a hydroponics system?” Make sure students choose a topic and guiding question that is reasonable and testable with the materials available to them.