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# Massachusetts Science & Engineering Fair

## MSEF Ethics Statement

The Massachusetts Science & Engineering Fair, Inc. (MSEF) has adopted an ethics statement that each student is required to adhere to and will be asked to sign as a part of the research plan and application process.

### **The Statement**

The primary reason that science project work enables a wide range of learning to take place for each individual student is that the students themselves "own the question". Students pose a scientific problem and seek the necessary avenues to find a solution.

When students work with a mentor either at school, in a lab or wherever project work takes place, adults working with students should bear in mind that it is the student's project. The mentor's job is to help students acquire background information, teach techniques required to test the purpose or hypothesis and above all to look out for the safety of young scientists and engineers.

The mentor should not suggest or assign a specific topic to the student (the idea must come from the student), collect or provide data for the student (unless the student is willing to give credit to the mentor and does not claim the data as their own) or analyze the data for the student. These actions take away the opportunity for students to do these activities on their own, and devalue student science project work in general. The motive for introducing science projects to young people is to help encourage responsible future scientists. The behavior of adult mentors should model the honesty and integrity expected of scientists in our world.

Before experimentation begins each student is required to complete a Research Plan, which includes signing the Ethics Statement that the student will, "adhere to all MSEF/ISEF rules when conducting research." Students may compete in only one MSEF affiliated fair, except when proceeding to the state fair from their affiliated regional fair. Students are only eligible to compete in one affiliated regional fair each year, as determined by the location of the Team Leader's school of enrollment in the case of Team Projects. These regions are determined by MSEF. The student(s) will be judged only on the most recent year's research.

Any act of plagiarism associated with science project work exhibited at the MSEF Fair will lead to disqualification. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines plagiarize as "to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own: use (a created production) without crediting the source: present as new and original an idea or product derived from an existing source."  
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In terms of science project work this means the student MUST:

- Complete all the necessary paperwork and permission forms, before, during and after experimentation, honestly.
- Document his/her work in a dated notebook, recording development of the project and including all references, procedures, original data and other relevant material.
- Include a bibliography as part of their background research
- Cite the author of any original statement that is not their own.
- Give credit to anyone giving assistance to the student. If another person(s) performed any part(s) of the experiment, data, collection, etc., credit must be given in the student's journal/log, display, and report.

In the lab - It is generally assumed that work presented by students at a science fair is the work of the student. When this is not the case, the student needs to make this very clear in their oral and written presentations of the project.

Photographs and Visuals - Any photographs included in the student's paper or on their presentation board are assumed to have been taken by the student. Any photographs NOT taken by the student MUST be clearly labeled giving credit to the photographer. This includes any visuals taken from magazines, newspapers, journals, the internet or texts where appropriate permission must be solicited and included. The use of photographs of persons requires a photo release signed by the subject, and if under 18 years of age, also by the guardian of the subject. Sample consent text: "I consent to the use of visual images, (photos, videos, etc.) involving my participation/my child's participation in the research."

Cheating - Any form of cheating associated with the performance of research, completion of paperwork or in adhering to the stated rules, at any time during the MSEF science fair process, will lead to disqualification. *Webster's Dictionary* defines cheat as "mislead; defraud; swindle; to practice deception or trickery". The following acts are considered cheating and will lead to failure to qualify.

Students MUST NOT:

- In any way falsify a permission form or scientific paper.
- Use another person's results or thoughts as their own, even with the permission of this person. This includes work done by a family member or a mentor.
- Use information or data obtained from the Internet without proper citation.
- Enter a project for a second or third year with only minor changes.

**Please Note:**

MSEF, Inc. is responsible for all decisions relative to project acceptance. All decisions are final. MSEF, Inc. assumes no responsibility for project acceptance decisions made at the school or regional levels.