

A fair rubric starts with the decision the panel must make. Write plain answers before naming criteria or assigning weights.

1. What is this competition trying to recognize?

Describe the outcome in one sentence. Avoid criteria words for now.

2. What evidence can every judge actually observe?

List what is visible, tasted, heard, demonstrated, or documented.

3. What must not influence the score?

Names, reputation, packaging, personal taste, prior results, or another known bias.

4. What makes an entry ineligible before scoring?

Keep eligibility and disqualification rules separate from quality criteria.

Bias check: if a judge could score differently after learning who entered, hide that information or write a recusal rule before judging starts.

Use four to eight distinct criteria. If two criteria reward the same evidence, combine them. Weights must total 100%.

Criterion	Definition	Observable anchor	Weight
1.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
2.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
3.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
4.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
5.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
6.	What this criterion means	What a judge can point to	%
TOTAL			100%

Quick-start examples (adapt, do not copy blindly)

- Bake-off: flavor 40%, texture 25%, appearance 20%, originality 15%
- Chili cook-off: flavor balance 35%, aroma 20%, texture 20%, heat integration 15%, appearance 10%
- Pitch contest: problem 20%, evidence 20%, solution 25%, feasibility 20%, presentation 15%

Write anchors before training judges. An anchor describes observable evidence, not how much you personally like the entry.

1-2 | Needs major work

What is missing, incorrect, unsafe, or fundamentally unclear?

3-4 | Below standard

What evidence is present but inconsistent or incomplete?

5-6 | Meets standard

What does competent, acceptable work look like?

7-8 | Strong

What specific evidence makes this clearly above standard?

9-10 | Exceptional

What rare evidence justifies the top of the scale?

Pilot checklist

- ☐ Two or more judges independently score the same three practice entries.
- ☐ Judges explain one high and one low score using the written anchors.
- ☐ Any criterion interpreted two ways is rewritten before the live event.
- ☐ Weights total 100%, eligibility rules are separate, and conflicts have a recusal path.
- ☐ The final rubric version is dated and frozen before the first live score.

Rubric version _____ Frozen on _____ Approved by _____