
GIS Day Map Contest

Judging Categories

This document defines the criteria used to judge GIS Day Map Contest entries. Each entry is scored in four equally weighted categories on a scale of 1 to 5, for a maximum of 20 points. Participants should use these criteria as a checklist when preparing their maps. Judges should use the scoring criteria to ensure consistent scoring across all entries.

Communication 5 points

On the form: *The map's subject, area, and main takeaway are clear within 10 seconds.*

Judges assess whether a first-time viewer can identify the map's subject, geographic area, and main takeaway within approximately 10 seconds. To meet this standard, a map must include a descriptive title that names the subject and area, a legend that explains every symbol and color used, labels that are legible at the submitted size, and a single focus that is not obscured by unrelated features.

Scoring Criteria

5	Subject, area, and takeaway are clear within 10 seconds. Title, legend, and labels are complete and legible, and nothing obscures the focus.
4	Subject and takeaway are clear, but one element (title, legend, or labels) is incomplete or difficult to read.
3	Subject is clear, but the takeaway requires more than 10 seconds to identify, or two or more elements are incomplete, illegible, or cluttered.
2	Subject can be identified only after close study. The title, legend, or labels are missing or largely illegible.
1	Neither the subject nor the takeaway can be determined from the map.

Design & Symbolology 5 points

On the form: *Visual hierarchy, layout, color, and symbols are organized and suited to the data.*

Judges assess visual organization and symbol choices. The most important features must be the most visually prominent, with basemaps and supporting layers muted. Map elements (title, legend, scale bar, data source, author, and north arrow where relevant) must be aligned and balanced, with no overlapping text or large unused areas. Colors must be clearly distinguishable from one another, and the color scheme must match the data type: sequential for ordered values, qualitative for categories, and diverging only when the data has a meaningful midpoint.

Scoring Criteria

5	Clear visual hierarchy; all elements aligned with no overlaps; color scheme matches the data type and all colors are distinguishable; default software styling has been customized.
4	Meets the standard with one minor flaw, such as a misaligned element or two colors that are hard to tell apart.
3	Two or three noticeable issues, such as overlapping labels, a crowded or unbalanced layout, or a color scheme that only partly matches the data type.
2	Weak or no visual hierarchy, multiple overlaps or clashing colors, or largely default software styling.
1	Elements are disorganized or unreadable, or the color scheme does not match the data type.

Creativity 5 points

On the form: *The map uses an original topic, perspective, or presentation technique.*

Judges assess whether the entry goes beyond common or template-based maps. Originality may come from three areas: an uncommon topic; a new perspective on a common topic, such as a different scale, time period, or audience; or a presentation technique beyond a standard thematic map, such as a custom

projection, small multiples, 3D, or hand-drawn elements. Creative choices must not reduce the map's clarity or accuracy.

Scoring Criteria

5	Original in at least two of the three areas (topic, perspective, technique), with no loss of clarity.
4	Original in one of the three areas and well executed.
3	Familiar topic and standard technique, competently executed, with minor original touches.
2	Closely follows a common example, tutorial, or template with only minor changes.
1	Reproduces a tutorial, template, or existing map with no meaningful changes.

Data & Topic 5 points

On the form: *Data is credible, cited, fairly represented, and addresses a clear question.*

Judges assess data quality and how accurately it is presented. Data must come from a credible source that is cited on the map along with the date of the data. Values must be represented fairly: use rates, percentages, or densities rather than raw counts when comparing areas of different size or population, since raw counts largely reflect where people live. Class breaks must not exaggerate or hide patterns. The topic must address a clearly stated question or issue.

Scoring Criteria

5	Source and year are listed, rates or percentages are used where needed, legend groups are fair, and the map answers a clear question.
4	Meets the standard with one small issue, such as a missing data year.
3	One major problem: no source listed, totals used where rates were needed, or legend groups that make the pattern misleading.
2	Two or more major problems, data that is outdated or from an unreliable source, or no clear question.
1	No source and the data can't be trusted, or the map shows something the data doesn't support.

Written Feedback

Judges provide a brief written comment for each entry that identifies at least one strength and one specific improvement. Comments are not scored and are shared with the participant.

How Scoring Works

4 categories × up to 5 points each = 20 points possible

Each category is scored from 1 to 5. Category scores are added for a total out of 20.