MESA DAY CONTEST RULES 2026-2027

(FINAL)

Cargo Glider

LEVEL: High School (HS)

DIVISION(S): Grades 9/10 and Grades 11/12

COMPOSITION OF TEAM: 2-3 students per team

NUMBER OF TEAMS: Preliminary – Determined by your local MESA center
Regional – # of teams per division at the discretion of each region (Northern, Central, LA/Central Coast, and Southern)

SPONSORS: Imperial Valley MESA College Prep

OVERVIEW: Changes, if any, from "DRAFT" rules are highlighted in "yellow." Students will design and construct a glider with a payload that, when launched by the Launching Mechanism, flies through the air, goes over an obstacle and lands on a target. The target will be identified by a colored dot on two pieces of blue painter's tape that intersect to form a + symbol on the ground and is located 10.36 meters (34 feet) away from the launcher (once released). The glider must successfully clear the designated obstacle. The glider must be the original work of each team. Judges may ask questions for verification. **Participation logistics, limits, and competition facilities may vary by host site. Advisors and students are responsible for verifying this information with their local MESA center.** Students should take into consideration the transportation of projects; competition ready projects must be transported safely to the competition site.

RESOURCE VIDEOS:
- Glider Competition Video 2026 - 2027
- Cargo Glider Concepts
- Overhead How To Build A Glider

LAB REPORT: An **engineering lab report** is a required component of this competition that is meant to clearly demonstrate and illustrate evidence of the application of the Engineering Design Process in the MESA project. The purpose of the Engineering Lab Report is for students to better understand the process an engineer goes through in the creation of a project. MESA projects are not designed to be completed in a single class period or day, but to be the result of thoughtful research, planning, analysis and evaluation. Keeping a lab report throughout the design process will help to keep a designer on track, using a logical progression of planning, in order to develop their project efficiently.

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For the Engineering Lab Report, **electronic submission will be required and the report must be visible, clear, and legible; if sections cannot be read, they will not be scored**. Teams should use an electronic portal/application such as Google Docs to keep and maintain a lab report. Access and permission to the lab report must then be given to MESA Day staff and judges OR lab report is submitted electronically (e.g., PDF file, WORD file) for review. **Please check with your local MESA center for the deadline and submission platform to submit your team's lab report for local and for regional events.** See "MESA Day 26-27 Engineering Lab Report Guidelines" at https://mesa.ucop.edu/.

MATERIALS:

LEGAL for glider: Various materials may be used to build the glider; materials are not limited to wood. Students should consider the strength of the material needed to withstand the force of the launcher. There is no restriction to the size and/or weight of the glider.

ILLEGAL for glider:

- Hazardous materials (to be determined by the Host Center)
- Remote control devices of any kind
- Additional power source(s) (i.e., thrust or lift) are not allowed.

The Host Center will provide the following:

- 2 six-foot tables for the impound station
- 1 six-foot table for the repair station
- 1 six-foot COSCO folding table or equivalent for Official Launcher Mechanism
- Leg Support to increase incline of the Launcher Mechanism (LINK)
  - For a gym-like floor please refer to this document. (LINK)
- Launcher will have a new rubber band after 70 uses with 15 initial uses to prime the rubber band.
- Safety goggles for team members and judge
- 3D Printed launcher adapter and resources (optional to use)

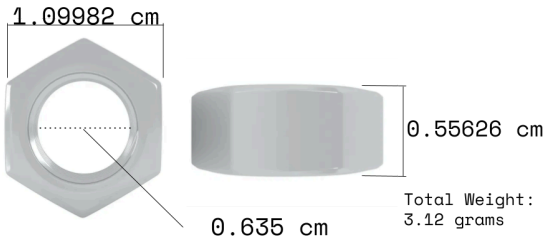
GENERAL RULES:

1) The students' full name, grade level, school name, number of Hex Nuts, and MESA center MUST be clearly labeled on the glider. A 10% penalty in the score will be assessed for failing to properly label. Gliders checked-in with a tie-on label will be required to launch having the label tied on.
2) The glider MUST contain an easily identifiable, prominent feature on the fuselage that adapts and connects with the launcher adapter or rubber band. Failure to follow this rule will result in a 10% penalty. If the adapter is not being used to launch the glider **both segments of the rubber band** have to be pulled symmetrically from the midpoint of the rubber band as pictured on Page 10.
3) Teams must be able to show the number of Hex Nuts (i.e., cargo/payload) the glider contains to the judge during registration, and the glider must be labeled with the number of Hex nuts it is carrying.
   a) The payload mass is defined as the total count of hex nuts secured within the glider, with a **required quantity of 10 hex nuts** (i.e., **exactly** 10 hex nuts are REQUIRED).
   b) Teams cannot change the shape of the Hex Nuts in any way, that includes crushing, cutting, drilling, etc.

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c) Teams MUST use Everbilt 1/4 in.-20 Zinc Plated Hex Nut. (Link) Each Hex Nut has a total weight of 3.12 grams.

d) Gluing or taping Hex Nuts to the glider or each other is acceptable as long as teams can show the judges that the Hex Nuts are visible and have not been modified.



4) Teams may only register/turn-in one glider for the competition.
5) All repair materials and tools MUST be provided by each team when registering at check-in. A toolkit provided by a school representative is permitted.
6) For the purpose of this competition, a glider is defined as a self-contained flying vehicle that remains intact during flight. The glider cannot have links of any kind with the ground that provide lift, propulsion or course guidance during the flight.
7) The judges' decision regarding the location of the glider's first-touch point (i.e., landing location) is considered final and is not subject for debate.
    a) Digital media (e.g., photos, video recordings, etc.) will not be accepted for judging purposes. **All judging decisions are final.**
8) Glider parts that break off during LANDING (i.e., upon initial impact with the ground or any object) are permissible but are not encouraged.
9) If parts of the glider break off DURING flight (i.e., while in flight) including the Hex Nuts (i.e., cargo/payload), the launch is considered a MISTRIAL. Flights that result in a mistrial are NOT eligible for points.
10) The glider MUST fly over the 60-inch (152.40 cm) obstacle and MUST stay within the 10-foot (3.048 m) width of the obstacle. Once the glider successfully clears the obstacle without contact, it is no longer required to remain within the 10-foot (3.048 m) width boundary. For gliders that go outside of the 10-foot boundary BEFORE flying over the obstacle or make contact with the obstacle, the launch is considered a MISTRIAL *(see Attachment C: Obstacle Specification)*
    a) If both launches are a MISTRIAL, the score will not be recorded.
11) The glider can be made from VARIOUS MATERIALS and have no restrictions on size or weight; however, the glider MUST be capable of being launched by the official launcher and MUST have an identifiable fuselage, wing, and tail.
12) Additional power source(s) (i.e., thrust or lift) are prohibited.
13) Remote-control (electronic) devices of any kind may not be used. If mechanical devices are used, these devices must be self-contained and may not provide any thrust to the glider.
14) Only team members can hold and repair their glider. The impound and repair station areas will be supervised by competition judges. Advisors, guardians, parents, and/or teachers are not allowed in the designated impound/ repair areas.
15) The glider and lab report must be the original work of the students. Judges may ask questions to confirm authenticity.

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JUDGING:

1) Gliders will be checked for specifications prior to the start of the competition. Teams that do not meet specifications after this initial check will have an opportunity to compete if they meet ALL of the following conditions:
    a) Accept an automatic "Mistrial" and therefore no score for Launch #1.
    b) Make repairs/modifications as necessary to bring the glider to proper specifications and be ready to compete when called for Launch #2.
    c) Make repairs/modifications only in the designated area as indicated by the judges.
    d) Failure to adhere to any of a, b, or c will result in disqualification.
2) Teams that meet the specification check but wish to make repairs and modifications may do so, but they MUST be ready to compete when called for Launch #1. Any gliders that are repaired or modified will be rechecked for specifications.
3) Each team will be allowed two (2) non-consecutive launches for their glider.
4) Each team must be ready within 1 minute of being called, or the team will forfeit that trial.
5) Each team will be given a 30 second window to set-up and then launch their glider.
6) One team member will be responsible for the launching of the glider (i.e., hooking the glider on the adapter/ rubber band and releasing it); the rest of the team members must remain behind the launching table.
    a) If needed, judge(s) will assist with stabilizing the table.
7) The target will be identified by a colored dot on two pieces of blue painter's tape that intersect to form a + mark on the ground and is located at a distance of 408in (1036.3 cm) in front of the table.
8) The glider's first-touch point (contact with any object) will be marked by the judges.
9) Measurements will be taken as the shortest distance between the target and the glider's first-touch point. Measurements will be to the nearest 2 cm (0.75 inches).
10) Teams are responsible for removing their glider from the contest area immediately after judges have marked the first-touch point.
11) One member of each team will be asked to place their glider on the impound table (an area designated by the judges) or the repair station table after every trial.
12) All glider repairs and/or alterations MUST be made under the supervision of a judge. New/spare/replacement parts ARE NOT ALLOWED. **The number of Hex nuts must remain the same between launch 1 and 2.** Repairs or alterations can ONLY be made with parts originally used when the glider was submitted for specification checks. Glue and/or tape to fix broken pieces is ALLOWED.
13) Both trials will be timed (to be used as the tiebreaker only). Times will be recorded, at a minimum, to the nearest hundredth second. The timing of the flight ends when any part of the glider comes in contact with any object (first-touch point). In case of a tie, the longest flight duration (hang-time) will be used as a tiebreaker.

SCORING:

1) **Performance Points (best of two launches)**
    a) Winning Performance (P_w) = team with the best accuracy from all teams in the same Division/Grade Level (receives 75 points)
    b) Team Performance (P_t) = team's best accuracy (distance closest to target) out of two

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launches

c) Team Performance Ratio = P_w divided by P_t

d) **Team Performance Points = P_w / P_t x 75**

2) Final Team Score = (Team Performance Points - Penalties) + Engineering Lab Report Points

a) Since the glider penalties (see General Rules 1 and 2) will be **subtracted** from the performance points, the following will serve as an example of how judges will factor in penalties on MESA Day.

Team # 1 had the best overall accuracy of 21 cm, their glider is not properly labeled, and scored 15 points on the lab report
Best Team Accuracy = 21 cm from Target
Best Overall Accuracy = 21 cm from Target
Performance Points = 21/21 = 1 x 75 = 75 points
Penalties = (10% for improper labeling) 10% x 75 = 7.5 points
Lab Report = 15 Points
Final Score = Performance Points - Penalties + Lab Report = 75 - 7.5 + 15 = 82.5 Points

Team # 2 had a best team accuracy of 55 cm and did not receive a penalty. They scored 25 points for the Lab Report.
Best Team Accuracy = 55 cm from Target
Best Overall Accuracy = 21 cm from Target
Performance Points = 21/55 = 0.38; 0.38 x 75 = 28.5 points
Penalties = None
Lab Report = 25 Points
Final Score = Performance Points - Penalties + Lab Report = 28.5 - 0 + 25 = 53.5 points

3) **TIEBREAKER**: if there is a tie among Final Scores, the glider with the longest flight time on the corresponding best launch will be the winner.

AWARDS:

- Teams who do not submit an Engineering Lab Report will NOT be eligible for any awards.
- Awards will be given per division: Grade 9/10 and Grades 11/12.
- Medals will be awarded for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place based on the Final Score.
- Ribbons will be awarded for Innovative Engineering Design.
- Only teams that place in the Final Score category will advance to Regional MESA Day; please check with your MESA center to determine the number of teams that advance to Regional MESA Day.

ATTACHMENTS/APPENDIX:

- A: Engineering Lab Report Mathematical Concepts
- B: Official Rubber Launcher Mechanism Specifications
- C: Obstacle Specification
- D: Course Layout
- E: Cargo Glider Specification Checklist
- F: Inspection and Score Sheet for Glider

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A - ENGINEERING LAB REPORT MATHEMATICAL CONCEPTS

Use of mathematical concepts/equations: MESA has provided a set of equations to help you along the way. While these equations are not mandatory to use, they should provide a roadmap to completing the math concepts.

1. Lift Equations = $Lift\ Coefficient \times \frac{Air\ Density \times Velocity\ Squared}{2} \times Wing\ Area$
2. $Aspect\ Ratio = \frac{Wing\ Length}{Wing\ Width}$

Applicable Math Concept/Equation (state concept/equation): Calculating Power

The lift coefficient can be calculated by multiplying the angle of attack (in this case 0.087(in radians) thanks to the launcher) by 2pi (3.14159); so, the lift coefficient is 0.547. The standard air density is 1.225 kg/m3. The velocity is calculated by dividing the distance traveled in the time it takes your glider to travel that far. All this is multiplied by the wing area. Wing area will vary based on shape. Please follow this link to use the appropriate formula.

Example: The wings on your glider are rectangular with a length of 3 meters and a width of 2 meters. Calculate the lift of your glider if it traveled 7 meters in 6 seconds.

$$Lift\ Coefficient \times \frac{Air\ Density \times Velocity\ Squared}{2} \times Wing\ Area$$

$$Lift = (0.547) \times \frac{1.225(kg/ms^3)\, x(\frac{7\ meters}{6\ second})^2}{2} \times (3\ meters\ x\ 2\ meters)$$

$$Lift = (0.547) \times \frac{1.22kg/m^3 \times \frac{49m^2}{36s^2}}{2} \times 6m^2$$

$$Lift = 0.547 \times (\frac{1.667\ kg/ms^2}{2}) \times 6m^2$$

$$Lift = 0.547 \times (0.834\ kg/ms^2) \times 6m^2$$

$$Lift = 2.737\ kg\frac{m}{s^2}$$

Applicable Math Concept/equation (state concept/equation): Calculating Aspect Ratio

An Aspect Ratio (AR) is written as follows 3:2. To calculate aspect ratio, simply measure the wing length and wing width. Afterwards, divide the length by the width.

$$Aspect\ Ratio = \frac{Wing\ Length}{Wing\ Width}$$

Example: If your wing width is 3 meters and your wing length is 27 meters after measuring, what is your glider's Aspect Ratio?

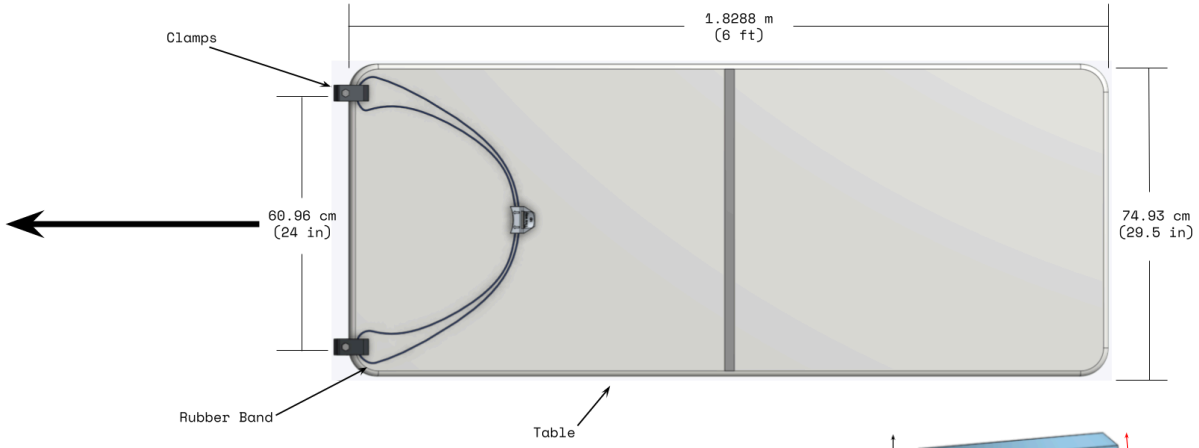
$$Aspect\ Ratio = \frac{Wing\ Length}{Wing\ Width}$$

$$AR = \frac{27\ meters}{3\ meters} \rightarrow AR = \frac{9\ meters}{1\ meters} \rightarrow AR = 9:1$$

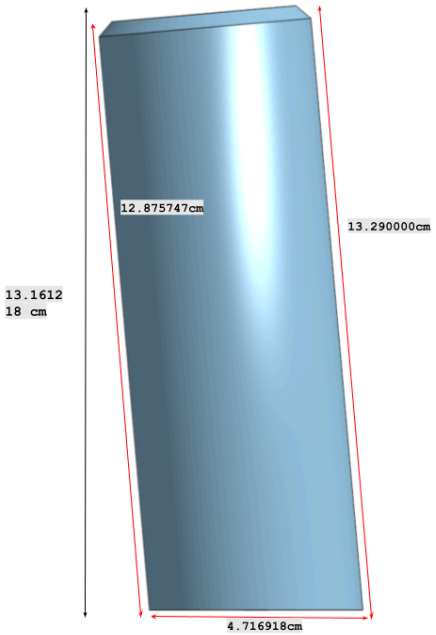
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B – OFFICIAL LAUNCHER MECHANISM SPECIFICATIONS

1. The only power source allowed for the glider to use is the rubber band provided by the host MESA center.
2. The official launcher mechanism consists of a folding table, a rubber band, and a set (2) of low profile clamps.
    a. The COSCO folding table or equivalent has a size of 74.93 cm (29.50 inches) width, 147 cm (72 inches) in length and 73.99 cm (29.13 inches). The folding table is angled at 5 degrees with the addition of two 3D Printed leg supports. Link to support
    b. The rubber band is a 1/4" Wide x 80" Circumference x 1/16" Thickness. It is available from McMaster-Carr, currently listed on https://www.mcmaster.com/8848T96/ as part number 8848T96. The band shall be initially primed 15 times before official use and will be replaced after the 70th launch. Its final position will be up to the competitors discretion.
    c. A set of low profile clamps (https://www.mcmaster.com/1705A11/) will be used to secure the rubber bands together. The clamps will be 60.96 cm (24 inches) apart from each other and placed towards the front of the folding table. The rubber band will be looped around.
    d. Leg Support to increase incline of the Launcher Mechanism, it gives the table a 5° slant. The bottom of the adapters are slanted to give the table stability while launching the glider. (LINK)
    e. A 3D printed model will be used as an adapter. (Link) (OPTIONAL)



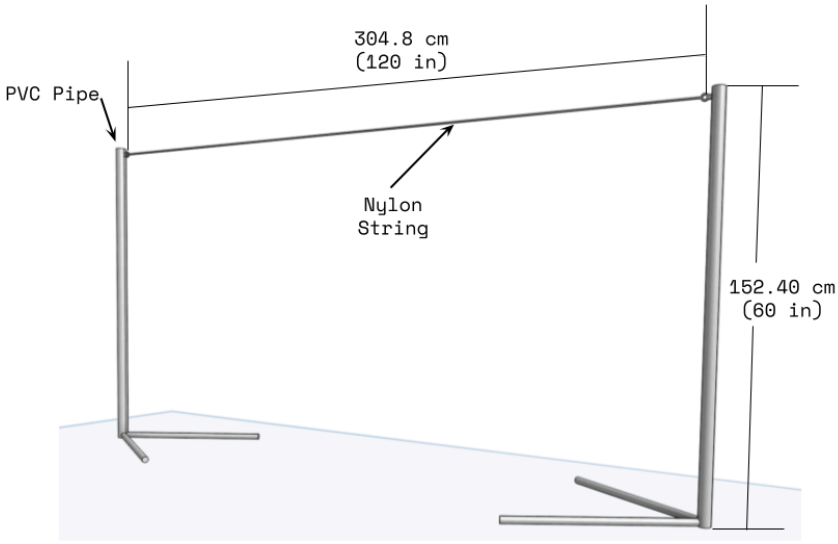


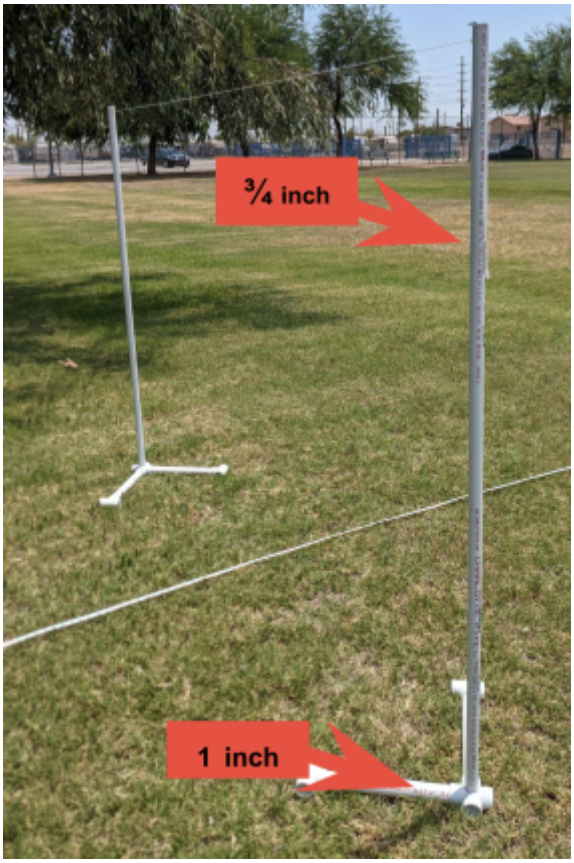


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C - OBSTACLE SPECIFICATION

1. The obstacle measurements are 152.40 cm (60in) in height and 3.048 m (10ft) in width.
2. The obstacle is constructed by two 152.40 cm (60in) PVC pipes, string and a pair of fish-eye screws.
3. Nylon String was used to connect both PVC Pipes.
4. 5ft will be measured from the middle of the Nylon string.
5. 1 inch cross fitting: Link
6. 1 inch 5ft PVC pipe: Link
7. 3/4 inch 5ft PVC pipe: Link

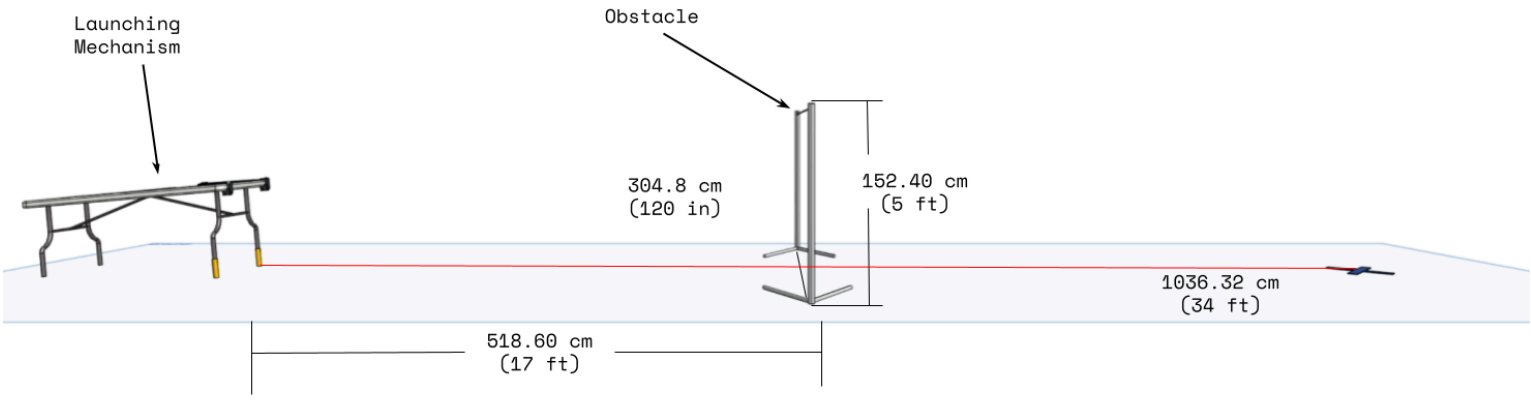


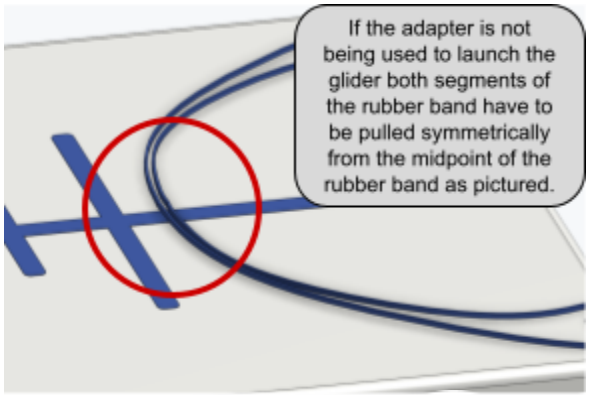


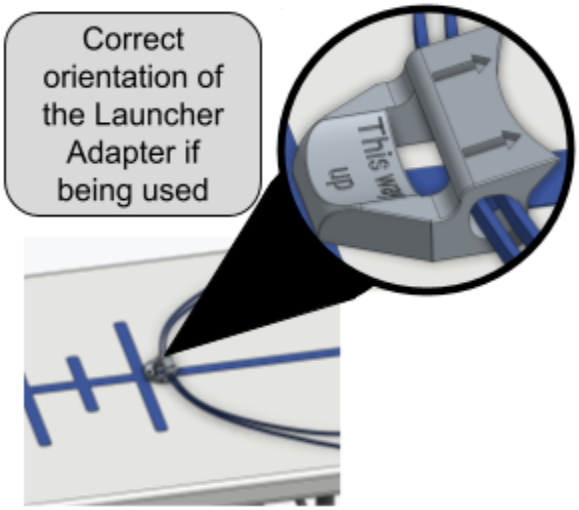
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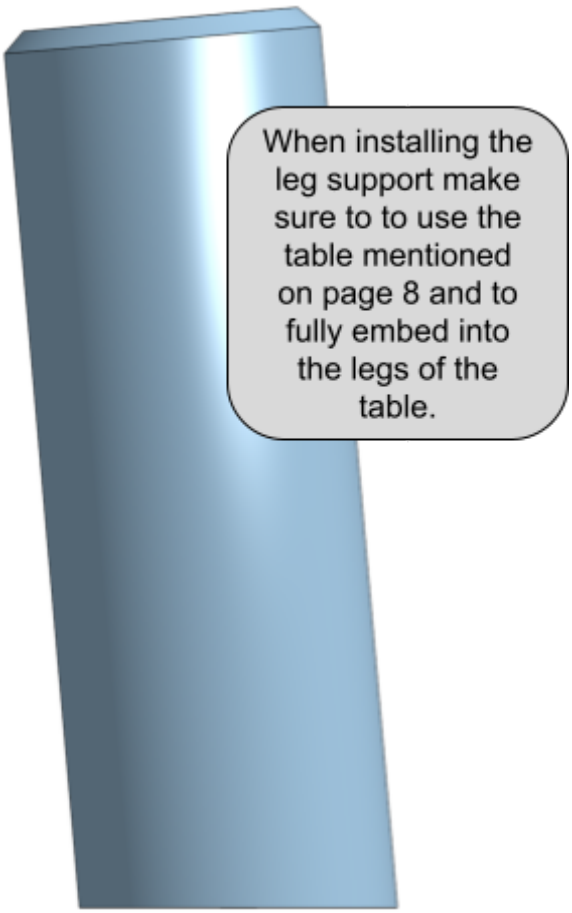
D - COURSE LAYOUT

1. The layout of the competition is shown in the diagram below.
2. The distance from the edge of the table to the obstacle is 518.60 cm (204in).
3. Click here to see a 3D model of the field.
4. The Target is 34 ft away from the edge of the launcher.
    a. Blue Painters Tape to construct the target must have a width of .94 in *Example*
    b. Colored dot must around be 1.9 cm(.75 in) in diameter *Example*









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E. Cargo Glider Specification Checklist

This checklist is provided **ONLY** as a reference for teams to "pre-inspect" their Glider to ensure they meet the rules specifications. Teams may check-off each of the following items after comparing their competition-ready Glider with the rules. **This checklist will NOT be used by judges.**

- ☐ 2026-2027 rules are used.
- ☐ Engineering Lab Report is properly labeled with team members' names, grade level, school name, and MESA center.
- ☐ Glider is properly labeled with team members' full name, grade level, school name, number of hex nuts, and MESA center.
- ☐ Glider has exactly 10 hex nuts with no more or no less.
- ☐ Glider contains a feature that adapts to the launcher adapter or rubber band that is easily identifiable.
- ☐ Glider is capable of self-sustained flight without links to the ground for lift, propulsion or guidance.
- ☐ Glider has an easily identifiable fuselage, wing, and tail.
- ☐ Glider does not use any remote control devices.

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F: INSPECTION AND SCORE SHEET FOR GLIDER

High School – Grades 9/10 and Grades 11/12

Copies of this inspection and score sheet will be provided by the MESA Day Host Center.

Student Names: _____. Grade: **9/10** or **11/12** (circle one)

School: _____ MESA Center: _____.

Specification Checklist:	Yes	No
Are the contestants' names, grade, school name, number of Hex Nuts, and MESA center clearly visible on the glider? (*if information is provided on a tie-on label—student MUST launch glider with label attached.*) - General Rule #1		10% Penalty
Does the glider contain a feature that adapts to the launcher adapter or rubber band that is easily identifiable? - General Rule #2		10% Penalty
Does the glider have the required quantity of 10 Hex Nuts (payload)?		DQ
Is the glider capable of self-sustained flight without links to the ground for lift, propulsion or guidance? - General Rule #6		DQ
Glider has an easily identifiable fuselage, wing, and tail? General Rule #11		DQ
Will stored energy be used after the initial launch for thrust or lift? (batteries, rubber band, etc.) - General Rule #12	DQ	
Does the glider use remote controls? General Rule #13	DQ	
Overall Specification Check	**Pass**	**Fail**

Engineering Lab Report	Points
Points Scored (25 pt maximum)	

Performance:
Measure to the nearest 2 cm (.75 in)

Distance (Glider's 1st Touch-point w/ ground or other obstruction):	Shortest Distance to Target	If the launch is disqualified, considered a Mistrial or none please indicate it below:
1st Launch:		Disqualified / Mistrial / None
2nd Launch:		Disqualified / Mistrial / None

Reasons for Glider Disqualification(s):	Reasons for Launch Mistrial:
Missing Hex Nuts. (See General Rule #3)	Glider part(s) break-off during flight
The glider must be capable of being launched by the official launcher and must have an identifiable fuselage, wing, and tail. (See General Rule #11)	Glider goes outside the boundary of the obstacle

Hang Time (needed for tiebreaker)
1st Launch Flight Time:
2nd Launch Flight Time:

Best TEAM Performance _____

Best WINNING Performance _____(from same division/grade level)

Performance Ratio (WINNING / TEAM) = _____

Performance Ratio x 75 = _____ **Performance Points**

Glider Penalties (0, 10% or 20%) = _____

Performance Points - Glider Penalties + Lab Report Pts =

FINAL SCORE _____

Engineering Lab Report Submitted: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Teams who do not submit an Engineering Lab Report will NOT be eligible for any awards.

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