

2025-26 STOSSEL IN THE CLASSROOM ESSAY CONTEST OFFICIAL RULES

All essays should specifically address one of the four Essay Topics.

Eligibility – The contest is open to writers in grades 5-12 at some point during the contest period September 10, 2025-March 13, 2026. No more than one essay submission will be accepted for each essay writer. Students may enter both the essay and video contests. Students must reside in the U.S., Canada, or at a U.S. military address, and all submissions should be in English. Employees of Stossel in the Classroom, Stossel TV, and Center for Independent Thought, or any person or organization involved in the operation and/or setup of the contest, and their immediate family members are not eligible for this contest.

Previous winners of a Stossel in the Classroom first place prize are not eligible for prizes in our subsequent contests, unless they're competing in a different division (middle school/high school) or contest type (essay/video/AI).

Essay Length – Essays must be 500-1,000 words in length. Submissions that do not meet this requirement, or that exceed it, will be disqualified. If an essay exceeds the word limit due to a "Works cited" page or bibliography, it will not be disqualified. If an essay would not meet the word minimum *without* its "Works cited" page or bibliography, it will not be disqualified.

Deadline – Essays must be submitted no later than 11:59pm Eastern Time, March 13, 2026.

Interview — Students whose submissions reach the final phase of judging must take part in a brief interview to discuss their essays. Students must have some availability during the week of May 17-23.

Plagiarism – All essays must be the original work of the student whose name is listed on the submission form. Plagiarism or AI-generated content will result in immediate disqualification.

Taxes – Winners will be solely responsible for any federal, state, or local taxes on winnings.

Judges – Essays will be judged on their ability to answer the topic question in an articulate, clear, and organized manner. Stossel in the Classroom will evaluate essay submissions in a fair and unbiased four-round judging system, in which judges all use the same criteria. Judges will be selected by Stossel in the Classroom based on their backgrounds and expertise in education, writing, and the subject matter. Decisions of the judges are final.

Ownership and Use – The ownership of any submission remains the property of the writer, but entry into the competition constitutes the entrant's permission and consent, without compensation, with or without attribution, for Stossel in the Classroom, Stossel TV, and Center for Independent Thought to use, reproduce, transmit, post, distribute, adapt, edit, and/or display the submission.