

Essay Contest Rules

CONTEST RULES

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

Eligibility – The contest is open to writers in grades 5-12, (ages 10-19) at some point during the contest period September 9, 2026-March 12, 2027. Only one essay submission will be accepted for each essay writer. Students may enter both the essay and video contests, but not both the essay contest and AI Challenge. Students must reside in the United States, 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 or high school) or contest type (essay/video/AI).

Essay Length – Essays must be 500-1,000 words. Submissions below 500 words or above 1,000 words will be disqualified. The Works Cited list can be used to reach the 500-word minimum, but will not be used to disqualify an essay for exceeding the 1,000-word maximum.

Deadline – Essays must be submitted no later than 11:59pm Eastern Time, March 12, 2027.

Interview – Students whose submissions reach the final phase of judging must take part in a brief interview to discuss their essays during the week of May 16-22, 2027.

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

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

Judging – 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.

TIPS FOR ESSAY WRITERS

- Proofread your essay before it's submitted. Spelling, punctuation, and grammar count.

- Stay within 500-1,000 word requirement.
- Be original. To win the top prize, your essay needs to stand out among thousands.
- Cite your sources and check your facts.
- If you have any questions about our contests, please email us at contests@SITC.org.

We look forward to reading your essay. Good luck!