2026 CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST

Fiction Rubric - Grades 1-5

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Strong (3)	Demonstrates (2)	Developing (1)
Story Structure	Logical overall structure	Mostly logical structure	Somewhat logical structure, though some ideas may be random	Overall structure is unclear
Characters & Settings	Characters and/or settings are developed, at least one round character that illustrates change/growth	Characters and/or settings are somewhat developed but characters may be flat	Characters and/or settings are identified but not developed	No indication of characters or settings
Word Choice	Effective language with adjectives, action verbs, and interesting phrases	Somewhat creative language choices	General or common language used	Simple words with minimal vocabulary
Theme	Theme is well-developed	Theme is somewhat developed	Theme is hinted at but may not be fully developed or understood	Story has no theme
Voice	Clear authorial voice/identity evident in writing with a creative story concept	Authorial voice/identity is somewhat developed and explores a somewhat creative story concept	Authorial voice is not always clear but writing experiments with creating a unique story concept	No identified authorial voice; writing is initiative and reformulates existing stories
Sentences & Paragraphs	All: Writes paragraphs of 5-6 complete sentences 4-5: Several paragraphs of 5-6 complete sentences sometimes complex/ Complex and compound sentences used without run-ons or fragments	1-3: Writes paragraphs of 3-4 complete sentences 4-5: 5-6 complete sentences. A few run-ons or fragments may be evident in compound sentences	1-3: Writes paragraphs of 1-2 complete sentences 4-5: 5-6 complete sentences. Several run-ons or fragments may be evident	1-3: Paragraphs have no complete sentences 4-5: 3-4 complete sentences. Compound or complex sentences may not be evident. Fragments may be common.
Spelling	1-3: Known words are spelled correctly, few words use phonetic spelling 4-5: Few or no spelling errors	1-3: Most known words spelled correctly, many words spelled phonetically 4-5: A few errors in each paragraph	1-3: 4 or more known spelling words missed 4-5: 4 or more errors per paragraph	Many words misspelled
Mechanics	Uses nouns and verbs correctly. Starts sentences with capitalization and uses punctuation correctly.	Misses difficult or plural noun and verb tenses. Most sentences start with capitals and punctuation is mostly correct.	Does not correctly use plurals or proper nouns, and/or struggles with verb tenses. Capitalization and punctuation may be random.	Uses nouns and verbs incorrectly, does not capitalize, and does not punctuate correctly
Overall Presentation	Legible. Neat. Grade appropriate	Writing is sometimes illegible. Mostly grade appropriate	Unable to read some parts of the story. Somewhat grade appropriate	Unable to read. Work does not appear to meet standards for grade.

Fiction Rubric - Grades 6-8

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Strong (3)	Demonstrates (2)	Developing (1)
Structure / Plot	Establishes strong plot/setting/characters/POV Clear, purposeful sequence of events.	Establishes plot/setting/character/POV Somewhat clear sequence of events	Some elements of story structure, little blending of dialogue and narration Attempts sequence of events, plot may be hard to follow	Few/no story elements present, unclear sequence of events
Character	Complex characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action. At least one round character.	Somewhat complex characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action	Some character development; most characters may be flat	Characters are under or undeveloped
Settings	Develops settings clearly with wide range of relevant details to engage and orient reader	Develops settings mostly clearly using relevant details to engage the reader	Uses some detail to develop setting	Uses incomplete or undeveloped setting; reader may feel "lost" in setting
Theme	Theme is well-developed	Theme is somewhat developed	Theme is hinted at but may not be fully developed or understood	Story has no theme
Voice	Clear authorial voice/identity evident in writing with a creative story concept	Authorial voice/identity is somewhat developed and explores a somewhat creative story concept	Authorial voice is not always clear but writing experiments with creating a unique story concept	No identified authorial voice; writing is imitative and reformulates existing stories
Description / Word Choice	Uses creative, concrete language; uses literary devices, rich sensory detail, and precise word choice	Uses mostly creative, concrete language, effective word choices, literary devices, and sensory detail	Some use of creative, concrete language and effective word choices, literary devices and sensory detail	Little use of concrete language and sensory details Language choices may be vague
Sentence Variety	Well-varied sentence structure throughout, used with intention	Good sentence structure and variety	Sentences mostly similar structure and length	Little sentence variety
Mechanics	Smooth, fluid, error-free punctuation and grammar Correct spelling; error free word usage	Mostly correct grammar; errors do not interfere with communication Mostly correct spelling and word usage	Some errors in grammar, spelling, and word usage interfere with understanding	Grammar and spelling errors prevent full understanding of text
Overall Presentation	Unique and appropriate title, professional presentation	Appropriate title, neat presentation	Unoriginal title, some attention to presentation detail	Untitled, attention to presentation is minimal or does not exist

Fiction Rubric - Grades 9-12

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Strong (3)	Demonstrates (2)	Developing (1)
Structure / Plot	Established strong plot/setting/characters/POV Clear, purposeful sequence of events	Establishes plot/setting/character/POV Somewhat clear sequence of events	Some elements of story structure, little blending of dialogue and narration Attempts sequence of events, plot may be hard to follow	Few/no story elements present, unclear sequence of events
Character	Complex characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action. At least one round character	Somewhat complex characters developed through dialogue, narration, and action	Some character development; most characters may be flat	Characters are under or undeveloped
Reader Engagement	Immediately engages and orients readers, develops ideas clearly and fully	Engages and orients the reader, ideas mostly clearly developed	Attempts to engage reader, ideas developed briefly	Does not engage reader
Settings	Develops settings clearly with wide range of relevant details to engage and orient reader	Develops setting mostly clearly using relevant details to engage the reader	Uses some detail to develop setting	Uses incomplete or undeveloped setting; reader may feel "lost" in setting
Theme	Theme is well-developed	Theme is somewhat developed	Theme is hinted at but may not be fully developed or understood	Story has no theme
Voice	Clear authorial voice/identity evident in writing with a creative story concept	Authorial voice/identity is somewhat developed and explores a somewhat creative story concept	Authorial voice is not always clear but writing experiments with creating a unique story concept	No identified authorial voice; writing is imitative and reformulates existing stories
Description / Word Choice	Uses creative, concrete language; uses literary devices, rich sensory detail, and precise word choice	Uses mostly creative, concrete language, effective word choices, literary devices and sensory detail	Some use of creative, concrete language and effective word choices, literary devices and sensory detail	Little use of concrete language and sensory details Language choices may be vague
Sentence Variety	Well-varied sentence structure throughout, used with intention	Good sentence structure and variety	Sentences mostly similar structure and length	Little sentence variety
Mechanics	Smooth, fluid, error-free punctuation and grammar Correct spelling; error free word usage	Mostly correct grammar; errors do not interfere with communication Mostly correct spelling and word usage	Some errors in grammar, spelling, and word usage interfere with understanding	Grammar and spelling errors prevent full understanding of text
Overall Presentation	Unique and appropriate title, professional presentation	Appropriate title, neat presentation	Unoriginal title, some attention to presentation detail	Untitled, attention to presentation is minimal or does not exist

*Collaborative Writing - Additional Criteria

*Please use the rubric assessment appropriate to the genre/age group of the chosen piece, then assess these categories in addition to that rubric

Criteria	Excellent (4)	Strong (3)	Demonstrates (2)	Developing (1)
Integration of voices	Voices are fully integrated, creating a unified, cohesive style throughout the piece	Voices blend well, though there may be minor shifts in tone or style	Voices are somewhat integrated, but noticeable differences disrupt the flow	Voices do not blend, creating a fragmented or inconsistent style
Cohesion and Consistency	The writing is highly cohesive, with a consistent tone, style, and perspective throughout. No noticeable shifts between authors.	Writing is mostly cohesive, with only slight shifts in tone or style	Some noticeable shifts in tone, style, or perspective make the piece feel disjointed	Writing lacks cohesion; tone, style, or perspective shifts are frequent and jarring