



2026 State Essay Competition

Competition Type – Individual

Contest Purpose

Being able to express one's thoughts clearly in written form is critical to success in almost any field, including education. The purpose of the essay competition is to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills, as well as to express their views on a current topic in education. The topic for this year's Essay Competition focuses on cell phone use in schools.

In 2025, Georgia passed the "Distraction-Free Education Act" which bans personal electronic devices during school hours for students in grades K-8 starting in July 2026. During the 2026 Georgia General Assembly, lawmakers will consider expanding the ban to include grades 9-12. Cell phone use in school is a hotly debated topic with some folks touting the benefits while others the opposite. Conduct research on cell phone use in school, form your own opinion, and defend your view in your essay.

Competition Guidelines

- A. Only one entry per chapter. Chapters may wish to hold a local competition to determine who will compete at State.
- B. Entry must contain the following identification information at the top of the document:
 - Student's name
 - Student's school
 - School system
 - FGE advisor's nameThis information does **not** count in the essay's word limit (see C below).
- C. The body of the essay must range from 1,000 to 1,250 words. The title of the essay, Works Cited, and the information identification information at the top (see A above) do not count in the word count.
- D. The essay must be the original work of the student. AI-generated content is prohibited.
- E. The essay must be written in English.
- F. The essay responses should be supported by information from sources related to the topic, all of which must be included in a Works Cited list.
- G. Contestants must include references and cite all their sources of information in a Works Cited list. Please take care to avoid plagiarism; plagiarized essays will be disqualified. **Essays without a Works Cited section will also be disqualified.**
- H. All entries become the property of PAGE, who assumes all rights and privileges to use.

Judging and Scoring

- A. The judges' decisions are final.
- B. Scoring is based on the Essay Competition rubric (see Judge's Scoring Rubric in this PDF).

Eligibility/How to Enter

- A. This competition is only for affiliated FGE chapters.
- B. To be eligible to compete, a student must have attended an FGE Day during the current school year or be registered to attend FGE Day at Middle Georgia State University on April 15.
- C. Student may not be entered in any other *individual* competition. (This does *not* include Knowledge Bowl.)
- D. Only one student per chapter may enter.
- E. Type your essay as a Word document, carefully following the Competition Guidelines above.
- F. The entry process is paperless. We will utilize an online form that contains a link to upload your essay electronically in Word document format. **Entry must be submitted by midnight on March 27, 2026.**

ESSAY COMPETITION

Judge's Scoring Rubric

Contestant's Name:

Contestant's School:

(Points awarded may range between zero and the maximum number indicated.)

Is the essay on the stated topic? YES NO

Does it include a Works Cited list? YES NO

If yes to both, continue with the scoring process. If no on either, do not continue with the scoring process.

A. GUIDELINES	Possible Points	Points Assigned
The essay is between 1,000 and 1,250 words. Score 5 if within limits; score 0 if not within limits.	5	5
The essay cites sources of information within the body of the essay.	10	
B. TOPIC ORGANIZATION		
The essay clearly presents a main idea (thesis) and supports it throughout the paper.	10	
The essay is well-planned and well-thought-out. Includes introduction, statement of main idea, convincing and relevant data and evidence to back up the main idea, and conclusion that strengthens the claim and evidence.	20	
C. ESSAY CONTENT		
The essay introduces a compelling claim that is clearly arguable and takes a purposeful position on an issue.	10	
The main idea is exceptionally well-presented and argued; ideas are detailed, well-developed, supported with specific evidence & facts, as well as examples and specific details.	20	
Sources are exceptionally well-integrated, and they support claims argued in the paper very effectively.	10	
D. MECHANICS/GRAMMAR		
All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The essay demonstrates mastery of the language and sentence composition that is clear and purposeful. The author makes no errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling.	15	
TOTAL	100	

Judges' Comments: