



# ISA

Essay  
Competition

Open to Year 5 - Year 13

## DEADLINE

Thursday 7 May 2026

Competition open to ISA Members' schools only  
Visit the ISA website for more information

[isaschools.org.uk](http://isaschools.org.uk) | [isaarts@isaschools.org.uk](mailto:isaarts@isaschools.org.uk)



The ISA Essay Competition is an annual opportunity for pupils at ISA Members' schools to showcase their writing skills. Young writers are invited to submit entries to a range of categories.

### **Eligibility**

Only schools whose Head is a Member with ISA are eligible to enter ISA competitions. Any pupils competing must be on the main school's admissions register, on the date of the event.

Open to Year 5-13. We encourage schools to run their own competition in house and submit their successful entries in the competition. Our year groups are based on the UK national curriculum, for more information and to check the correct year group for your students see [here](#). Please ensure you enter pupils according to the UK system, even if your own school's age group system differs.

At ISA, we are committed to making our opportunities accessible, we welcome applications from all pupils, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. If your pupil(s), those with an EHCP or on the school's SEND register, are working at a level that differs from their age group's key stage, or if your school or student focuses on development and skills rather than year groups, please contact us.

Alternative formats of these guidelines are available on request. Please notify us at the earliest opportunity so we can provide the document accordingly, if required.

### **Year Groups**

Schools may submit a maximum of two entries for each category except for the Year 12-13 category, who may enter up to six essays in total. We encourage schools to run their own competition in house and submit their successful entries in the competition. (Please note that some year groups might be combined for the judging process).

- Year 5
- Year 6
- Year 7
- Year 8
- Year 9
- Year 10
- Year 11
- Year 12
- Year 13

### **Judging criteria**

- Originality and creativity
- Style and presentation
- Use of language
- Form and structure

### How to enter

- Entries must be submitted via the online entry form on the ISA website [here](#) by .
- All files must be PDF or word documents named in the following format: school name followed by the pupil or group name e.g. SchoolName\_JohnSmith
- Entries can be handwritten or typed.
- Entries should be unaided work. They should not have been heavily edited/re-drafted following teacher comments or feedback.
- Entries can be written in any language, provided an English translation is given.
- Entries must mention final word count at the end of each essay.
- Essays can be creative or academic. Themes for each category below.
- While we recognise the potential benefit of AI, we kindly request that participants are using it for inspiration and support and in line with their schools policies on its use, rather than using it to generate their essays. Please include details about the process of using AI under “any special circumstances” box if applicable, so judges are aware.
- Entries must be the work of individuals only.
- For the sixth form competition, students can choose to write about any topic or genre. #For the other three age groups there are a range of titles to choose from.
- Please see titles and guidelines per category below.

### **Year 5-6**

For this Category, candidates will turn/have turned 10 or 11 years old in the 2024–25 academic year (equivalent to Years 5 and 6). Schools can submit a maximum of two entries in this category. Candidates should submit an original piece of writing in response to the following titles (Word limit of 500-800):

- 1. Imaginative: Fossilised human footprints show a child and an adult running together. Imagine their story.**
- 2. Fantasy: While gardening we discovered a hedgehog, but it was no ordinary hedgehog! Create an adventure.**
- 3. Science: Describe a typical day if you were born in 100,000 AD.**
- 4. Autobiography: Explore the World War II experiences. This may be inspired by a real person or entirely fictional.**
- 5. News article: Write an amusing report on a summer holiday that went wrong!**

### Year 7-8

For this category, candidates will turn/have turned 12 or 13 years old in the 2024–25 academic year (equivalent to Years 7 and 8). Schools can submit a maximum of two entries for this category. Candidates should submit an original piece of writing in response to the following titles: (Word limit of 500-800)

1. One starry night...
2. The Elephant in the Room
3. The Missing Link
4. In Deep Water
5. If you were able to achieve world fame, which attribute would you like it to be for and why?
6. Life's Simple Pleasures.
7. The Time Traveller

### Year 9-11

For this category, candidates will turn/have turned 14, 15 or 16 years old in the 2024–25 academic year (equivalent to Years 9-11). Schools can submit a maximum of two entries for this category. Candidates should submit an original piece of writing in response to the following titles: (Word limit of 500-800)

1. The precipice...
2. A trouble shared is a trouble halved...
3. Smoke screen...
4. Counting the cost...
5. Surprise, surprise...

### Year 12-13

Entrants must be still in full-time education at an ISA School at the time of entering. Schools may submit a maximum of six entries for this category. An original piece of writing (1,000 words maximum) is required on any topic and in any genre. Submissions will be judged in the following categories:

1. Fiction writing
2. Arts, English, and Humanities
3. Science and Technology
4. History, Politics, and Economics

Submissions can be pieces of work that have already been completed during sixth form studies, however they should not have been heavily edited/re-drafted following teacher comments or feedback.

If you have any questions, please contact [isaarts@isaschools.org.uk](mailto:isaarts@isaschools.org.uk)