



## ABMF 2026 Past is Prologue Essay Contest

### Policies and Procedures

#### FAQ's

[essaycontest@abmf.org](mailto:essaycontest@abmf.org)

**Can a student who is age 10 or age 19 on May 3, 2026 participate in the 2026 ABMF *Past is Prologue* Essay Contest?** Participants must be 11-18 years of age on May 3, 2026 to participate in the 2026 ABMF Past is Prologue Essay Contest. If a participant is 10 or 19 years-old at 10PM MDT on May 3, 2026, they are not eligible to participate.

**Can a student in college participate?** No. If you have finished high school, even if you are still 18 years old, this contest is meant for students in middle and high school.

**May I participate even if I personally know one of the judges or ABMF staff?** Because students use a unique Participant ID#, rather than their name, we can avoid any bias of the judges, so yes, you may participate. However, a judge may not serve as an adult editor for a student. Family members of ABMF staff may not participate.

**What are the grounds for disqualifying an essay?** Essays may be disqualified if written by artificial intelligence, plagiarized (failing to give credit to someone else for their work that you quote), or including your name and ***failing to use the unique Participant ID # when uploading your essay.*** (Your name is on the application form, which is tied to the unique Participant ID#. Please do NOT put your name on the essay; use only your unique Participant ID#.)

**Why do I include my Participant ID # on the essay, rather than my name?** When you send your application, which includes the student's and the adult editor's names, a unique Participant ID# is sent to you. We use the Participant ID # to avoid any unintentional bias on the part of the judges and to more easily manage the essays among age groups. **Failure to use your unique Participant ID# on your essay, instead of your name, will cause disqualification and your essay will not be entered into the judging pool.**

**What if I entered a previous ABMF Past is Prologue Essay Contest, do I use that Participant ID#?** No. Participant ID# are assigned fresh for each year's contest.

**What is AI (artificial intelligence) writing? How can I avoid AI writing?** AI writing is computer-generated text that imitates human writing to communicate ideas or information. Generative AI is used for text, images, audio and video messaging. When Copilot, ChatGPT, Grammarly or some other AI writing assistant auto-fills a sentence or pops-up with a message like, "It would sound better if you wrote it like this..." and you say, "okay", that's AI writing. Avoid AI by writing in your own, authentic voice. Remember, AI was created by human beings, and your insights and creativity will always be more valuable than a machine. Spell-check is not considered AI for the purposes of the Essay Contest.

**How does ABMF check for originality and plagiarism?** Every essay is scanned through a dedicated software to check that the essay is original to the student and that quotes are attributed.

**What is the process to participate?**

- Fill-out and submit the online Application Form naming your adult editor and signed by your parent/ guardian. (Your parent may also be your adult editor.)
- Receive your unique Participant ID# via email to the adult editor. Check your spam file if it doesn't come through right away. Contact [essaycontest@abmf.org](mailto:essaycontest@abmf.org) if you don't receive the Participant ID #. There may be some incompatibility between servers.
- Talk with your adult editor to help you choose your essay topic.
- Research the topic.
- Talk with your adult editor about what you want to say in your essay.
- Write an outline of your essay.
- Remember to answer the two mandatory questions: 1) What lessons should we learn from that past event? 2) Why do those events so long ago matter for your life today? The mandatory questions may be woven into the essay or treated separately. There are no right or wrong answers to the mandatory questions; you only receive points for answering the mandatory questions.
- Write a rough draft of your essay.
- Edit the draft. Ask your adult editor to read and comment.
- Write the final essay. Be sure to identify your sources.
- Do not send a cover sheet. Instead, put a header on each page.
- Essays must be output as typed, double-spaced, in Times New Roman (or equivalent), 12 pt typeface. Identify source materials and citations either as footnotes or in a list at the end.
- **Header should include: Your Participant ID#, NO NAME, Title of the Essay, Date of the Essay, word count and page number.** Word count DOES NOT include citations, sources, bibliography or header. The Header should appear on all pages. (Many judges download the essays and print a hardcopy to make notes. Including the requested information on the header ensures none of your pages is lost or confused with another essay.)
- Word Count: Ages 11-12 800-1,000 words; Ages 13-15: 1,200-1,500 words; Ages 16-18: 1,800 words. You must cite sources, and references are not included in the word count.
- Quoted material should be used sparingly and must include a citation of author, publication and date.
- All essays must be an original product. All essays are scanned for use of Artificial Intelligence and plagiarism. Essays written with AI or plagiarized will be disqualified.
- **Upload your essay in pdf format NO LATER THAN Sunday, May 3 at 10pm MDT** at <https://abmf.org/upload-your-essay/> Requests for an extension on the deadline will not be granted.
- Your adult editor will receive an email message that your essay was received.
- After the 1<sup>st</sup> Round of Judging, we'll send an email to your adult editor about the status of your essay.
- If your essay advances to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round of Judging, we'll send an email to your adult editor about that.
- If your essay advances to the Final Review of Judging, we'll send an email to your adult editor about that.

- If your essay won a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> prize in your age group, your adult editor will receive a phone call to arrange a time when both the student and adult can talk with us about next steps.
- Students winning Honorable Mention will be sent a certificate of the award and their essay will be posted on the ABMF website.
- Winners will be publicly announced on Sunday, Sept 27, Gold Star Mother's & Family's Day.

**Can I submit an essay through my school communication portal?** All essays must be uploaded through the portal via the ABMF website, <https://abmf.org/upload-your-essay/> using the Participant ID# that is sent with the Application Received email. We cannot access documents that are sent through school district communication portals. **Photos or scans of essays will not be accepted.**

**How will I know if ABMF has received my submitted essay?** Once you submit your essay, you will receive an email confirmation right away. This is an automated process, so if you do not receive a confirmation within a few hours, please contact us at [essaycontest@abmf.org](mailto:essaycontest@abmf.org).

**If I won in a previous year, may I participate again?** No – you're so good, we want to give others a chance! If you are a past winner of a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> Prize, you may not participate in the Essay Contest, even if you would be in an older age group. If, however, you received an Honorable Mention in a previous contest, please put that good thinking to work and try again for a cash prize.

**Do I need the signature / permission of my parent or guardian if I am 18?** Yes, because the age of majority is different in several states, and because part of the reason for the Contest is to prompt discussions between students and their adult editor (generally their parent/guardian), ABMF has made a blanket policy to require all participants to have the consent of their parent or guardian. By policy to respect parents and protect the privacy of minors, ABMF only communicates with the adult editor, not directly with minors.

**What are the criteria for judging?** [Judging Rubric](#)

- Focus, Purpose, Thesis – clear development of thesis and answering the mandatory questions
- Structure and Organization – well-developed essential details, transitions, conclusion
- Ideas, Support & Evidence – historical accuracy with ideas relevant to the thesis
- Originality – Audience, tone, point of view, vocabulary, word choice
- Sentence Structure and Mechanics - spelling, punctuation, grammar
- Presentation – Correct header information on each page

**If I win, what is expected from me?** With the permission of their parent and agreement of the student, winning students are interviewed via video conferencing about what they learned in writing the essay and their advice for other students to participate in the future. These videos are edited and used for marketing materials used by ABMF to expand the contest. [Watch montages](#) of former winners to see how we promote the winners and the contest. By policy, ABMF does

not sell or share its contact lists, and we only communicate with minors through their parent/guardian.

Also, if possible, for ABMF and the winning student and parent agrees, we may make an in-person award presentation at your school assembly. This is a great way to give you recognition – and to invite your fellow students to participate the next year.

Winning students must send to ABMF a signed, dated IRS Form W9 with their social security number before any prize money may be awarded. Prizes are typically sent as checks, made payable to the winning student, within thirty days of the announcement of winners.

**How does ABMF protect the privacy of winning students?** By policy, ABMF only uses the first name, last initial, and town/city/ state of students in our marketing materials.

**Are there any restrictions on how the prize money may be used?** No, you earned it; you spend it! Many students save part of their winnings for higher education. Others have used the money to help with family expenses, make donations to a cause they favor, or to buy a car.

**Do I pay tax on the prize money?** Checks are payable to the winning student. In 2025, as an example, if the student had income of < \$11,925, no income tax filing was required. Generally speaking, prize monies are not taxable when used for educational purposes. ABMF does not offer advice regarding your tax status. Please alert ABMF if you need a Form 1099 for 2026 tax filing.

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