Essay competition: *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*

2027 Competition: Rules and Guidance Note for Entrants

The International Organization for Chemical Sciences in Development (IOCD), in collaboration with the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC), is organizing the 2027 Essay Competition in the series ***Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability***. The theme for the 2027 competition is:

How can the chemical sciences design products that are safe and sustainable, without compromising the benefits they provide to society?

Competition Rules

1. The Competition is open globally to entrants who are under 35 years of age on the closing date 31 March 2027. IOCD encourages entries from all people meeting this requirement from around the world, including those below age 18 (who must, however, provide consent from a Parent or Guardian on the Entry Form).

2. The essay must have only a single author and be entirely the unaided work of the entrant.

3. Essays must not exceed 1500 words of main text (i.e., not including references, Figure captions or Table contents, declarations of Conflict of Interest, Data Availability, or Acknowledgements in the word count). Any essays exceeding the limit will be disqualified.

4. The essay itself should be self-explanatory without requiring further background reading. However, all sources of material used in writing the essay must be cited in the reference format used for *RSC Sustainability* (see point 6).

5. As part of the evaluation, all essays considered for shortlisting will be screened for plagiarism. Inclusion of significant amounts of text copied from the literature and without citation of the source will result in disqualification. All essays considered for shortlisting will also be screened for evidence of having been largely or entirely written by AI. Only limited use of AI is permitted, for checking grammar and improving readability.

6. Literature references indicating sources should be given in full, in the format required by *RSC Sustainability*. Every reference must include an active web link to where the cited material can be found – either as a DOI (in the format of either e.g., https://doi.org/10.1021/acssuschemeng.2c03159 or DOI: 10.1021/acssuschemeng.2c03159), or as a URL (e.g., https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/Essay/competition2026.html).
   RSC Referencing Guidelines can be found, for example, at:
   https://guides.library.lincoln.ac.uk/chemistry/RSC/referencing.

Note: a DOI or URL on its own is NOT sufficient – the full citation to the authors/publication details must be included.

7. Only original Tables or Figures may be included, unless the entrant can provide a formal statement of permission to reproduce from the publication from which the material is copied. Text associated with these is not counted in the limit of 1500 words for the main text of the essay. Figures must be provided at sufficient resolution and with adequate text font size to be easily legible when published – those that lack sufficient clarity will be returned for improvement, or rejected. The drawing package used for producing original figures must be stated.

Evaluation

1. After preliminary screening to establish compliance with the Competition rules, eligible essays will be subject to first-stage evaluation, with quantitative scoring and qualitative assessments contributed by a global panel of evaluators. From the results, the shortlisted entries will be identified. At this point, the authors of the shortlisted essays may be contacted to provide additional information or clarifications. In stage 2, those essays shortlisted will be subjected to a further round of evaluation, from which the Finalists and Regional Winners will be chosen.

2. In parallel with stage 2, those entrants whose essays are shortlisted will be requested to provide:
   - Documentation to confirm date of birth
   - A photograph (head shot) and brief bio-sketch
   - A Statement on the Use of AI, in conformity with RSC publication requirements.
   - A Statement concerning availability of data if it has been assembled and used but is not in the essay itself.
   - A Statement on whether any Conflict of Interest exists.
   - High resolution images of any original Figures they have included.
   - A 'Table of Contents' entry which includes a 'Graphical Abstract' consisting of a drawing and up to 250 characters of text (including spaces).

   When all the stage 2 evaluations are complete, based on the entrant's country of normal residence essays will be grouped into seven regions for selection of winners, according to the World Bank's listing of country regions, as updated in 2026. The seven regional groupings are:
   - East Asia & Pacific
   - Europe & Central Asia
   - Latin America & Caribbean.
   - Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan & Pakistan
   - North America
   - South Asia
   - Sub-Saharan Africa

3. The judges reserve the right not to award a prize in any region where the highest-scoring essay that year does not reach the standard they consider appropriate.

Prizes and features

1. **Regional Winners:** Each will receive a prize of US$ 500 and a Winner's Certificate and the Regional Winners' essays will be published in *RSC Sustainability.*

2. **Finalists**: Each will receive a Finalist's Certificate and the Finalists' essays will be collected in an annual compendium, *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*, published as a PDF online and available on IOCD's website.

3. **Both Regional Winners and Finalists** will be encouraged to prepare short videos which summarised the main messages in their essays. Selected videos will be made available from time to time on IOCD's website.

Submission

- Every entry must include a completed Entry Form and an Essay, both as WORD documents only (unless the Entry Form requires scanning to show a Parent/Guardian signature for entrants under 18, in which case the signed copy may be additionally submitted as a PDF). Entry Forms are available on the IOCD website, here: https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/Essay/competition2027.html
- The completed Entry Form (named as LASTNAME Entry Form) and Essay documents (named as LASTNAME Essay and LASTNAME Fig 1, etc) must be emailed to the Essay Manager at: essay@iocd.org, to be received **not later than midnight GMT on 31 March 2027**.
- In the subject line of your email, please write:
  2027 Essay Competition Entry: [firstname LASTNAME] - e.g., 2027 Essay Competition Entry: Angela BROWN

Guidance notes for entrants

Key aspects of the evaluation process for the Essay Competition focus on:

- Relevance of the title and content of the entry to the annual theme set for the Competition. Broad flexibility will be applied in assessing the approach taken by entrants to framing the theme, which might be addressed, for example, through (but not limited to) contexts such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals or to specific international challenges such as climate change, clean energy, sustainable production, waste and pollution, critical resource shortages or material stewardship. Whatever framing is adopted, essays will be judged on how well they highlight the importance of scientific approaches grounded in the chemical sciences for solving sustainability challenges. Essays may focus, in part, on a particular chemistry-based approach and/or particular setting. Overall, however, entrants are encouraged to take a wide, global perspective, including reflecting on the intersection of science, society and policy aspects, rather than only describing a particular scientific advance in great technical detail. **Entrants should create their own title for their essay, related to the theme set**.
- Clarity of presentation, including descriptions of problems and approaches to solutions and arguments about how to achieve progress.
- Relevance and clarity of any Figures or Tables presented in the essay.
- Relevance and appropriateness of literature cited.

For examples of styles, contents and approaches that scored well in previous Essay Competitions, entrants are encouraged to look at the published essays from the Reginal Winners and Finalists, which can be found here:

2023
Regional Winners:
https://pubs.rsc.org/su/collection/31824/IOCD-Essay-Competition-Winners-2023
Finalists:
https://www.iocd.org/v2_PDF/2023FinalistsCompendium01c.pdf

2024
Regional Winners:
https://pubs.rsc.org/su/collection/31825/IOCD-Essay-Competition-Winners-2024

Finalists:
https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/PdfFiles/2024FinalistsCompendium.pdf

2025
Regional Winners:
https://pubs.rsc.org/su/collection/31826/IOCD-Essay-Competition-Winners-2025
Finalists:
https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/PdfFiles/2025FinalistsCompendium.pdf

2026
Finalists:
https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/PdfFiles/2026FinalistsCompendium.pdf

Assistance with access to literature

IOCD is mindful that some aspiring entrants may have difficulty in gaining access to full papers if these are not on open access and their institutional libraries do not have the relevant subscriptions. IOCD has received a generous offer of assistance from one of its members based in Mexico, who may be able to provide copies of a few key papers per person, subject to local limitations of subscriptions. For further details on how to apply for this help, please write to riusal@quimica.unam.mx.

Enquiries about the 2027 IOCD Essay Competition should be addressed to the Essay Manager at: essay@iocd.org