

Official Rules

2026 PSBR & SPARC Essay, Poster, and Digital Media Contests

NO PURCHASE NECESSARY

PROMOTION DESCRIPTION: The 2025-2026 PSBR Contests (Essay, Poster, and Digital Media) begin at **12:01 a.m. Eastern Time on September 1, 2025 and end at 11:59 p.m. ET on March 8, 2026.** All poster, essay, and digital media submissions must be received via email or postmarked by 11:59 p.m. ET on Sunday, March 8, 2026. The Middle School Grade Essay Contest provides 6th, 7th and 8th grade entrants with the opportunity to submit an essay on the topic, "What is Biomedical Research?" The High School Essay Contest provides 9th-12th grade entrants with the opportunity to submit an essay on the topic, "Biomedical Research and My Life." Students in K-12th grade can participate in the poster contest by submitting a poster on one of the following topics: Animal Research Saves Lives; Veterinary Advancements: Animal Research Helping Animals; Advancements in Biotechnology; Careers in Biomedical Research; or 3R's: Replacement, Reduction, Refinement. The Digital Media Contest provides entrants the opportunity to demonstrate the relationship between biomedical research and their life through a digital media submission.

By participating in the Contests, each entrant unconditionally accepts and agrees to comply with and abide by these Official Rules and the decisions of the Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research (PSBR), PO Box 1163, Camp Hill, PA 17001-1163 ("Sponsor"), which shall be final and binding in all respects.

ELIGIBILITY: The Essay Contest is open to all students in grades sixth through twelfth in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and West Virginia who are currently enrolled in school or homeschooling. The Poster Contest is open to all students in grades kindergarten through twelfth grade in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and West Virginia. The Digital Media Contest is open to all students in grades sixth through twelfth in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and West Virginia. Every student meeting the grade level requirement for each contest is eligible including (but not limited to) public, private, online, parochial, home-schooled, youth organizations, etc.

Previous 1st Place winners (High School Essay Contest); previous 1st Place winners (Middle School Essay Contest); and previous 1st Place winners (Digital Media Contest) are not eligible to win.

HOW TO ENTER: To enter, visit our website www.psbr.org for forms and resources. Submit a complete cover page with an essay and/or a complete release form with a poster and/or a complete actor and parent release form with a digital media submission. Limit one (1) entry per person, per contest. Each student may submit one entry for the essay contest AND one entry for the poster contest AND one entry for the digital media contest each year. Students may not submit multiple entries per contest. Entries can be emailed to PSBR at contests@psbr.org OR must be postmarked by the deadline date and mailed to PSBR at PO Box 1163, Camp Hill, PA 17001-1163.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS: Each Essay that is entered into the Contest must meet the following "Essay Requirements" (If any Essay, in Sponsor's complete discretion, violates the following criteria it will be disqualified): (a) Essay must be your own original, unmodified, previously unpublished work and not contain any third party copyrighted material; (b)

Middle School Essays must be no more than seven hundred and fifty (750) words. 9th-12th grade Essays must be no more than seven hundred and fifty (750) words; (c) A cover page with the required information must be submitted with each Essay; (d) Nothing in the Essay itself can identify the student or the school (all personal information must be kept on the cover page); and (e) Essay must not include text that is obscene, pornographic, libelous, illegal, or discriminative.

Each Poster entered into the Contest must meet the following “Poster Requirements” (If any Poster, in Sponsor’s complete discretion, violates the following criteria it will be disqualified): (a) Poster must be your own original, unmodified, previously unpublished work and not contain any third party copyrighted material or images; (b) Poster must be representative of one of the eligible themes; (c) Poster must be a minimum of 8 ½” x 11” in size and a maximum of 11” x 17” in size and presented in landscape layout only; (d) Release form is completely filled out with all required information; the form is signed; and the form is securely attached to the back of the poster; (e) Nothing on the Poster can identify the student or the school; and (f) Poster must not include text or images that are obscene, pornographic, libelous, illegal, discriminative, or copyrighted.

Each Digital Media entered into the Contest must meet the following “Digital Media Requirements” (If any Media, in Sponsor’s complete discretion, violates the following criteria it will be disqualified): (a) Media must be your own original, unmodified, previously unpublished work and not contain any third party copyrighted material; (b) Media must not include text/video/image/cartoon/etc. that is obscene, pornographic, libelous, illegal, or discriminative; (c) Media must be representative of the eligible theme; (d) Media must be submitted in one of four video formats: .MOV, .MP4, .WMV, .AVI; (e) Length of the media may not exceed 3 minutes (180 seconds) not including the 5 second title screen and 5 second works cited screen; (f) All entries begin with a 5 second title screen and end with a 5 second works cited screen; (g) No professional assistance may be provided; (h) All media is submitted with the required release forms. Entries submitted by anyone under the age of eighteen must include the signed approval of a parent or guardian.

All information requested must be completed to enter and to be eligible to win. Sponsor shall have no liability for any Essay, Poster, or Media that is lost in the mail or not received by the Sponsor.

Submissions may NOT:

1. Violate existing copyrights or trademarks, logos, or other copyrighted material not owned or created by entrant or used without permission (such as company names, music, photographs, works of art, or images published on or in websites, television, movies, or other media);
2. use individuals’ names, in whole or in part (including the entrant’s last name) without permission;
3. refer to public figures;
4. contain profanity, pornographic, or sexual content, content promoting alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, hateful content of any kind (including racism, sexism, etc.), or any other offensive, obscene, or inappropriate content as determined by Sponsor;
5. defame, misrepresent, or contain disparaging remarks about people or companies;
6. promote a political agenda regardless of the political affiliation;
7. contain the names, likenesses, photographs, or other identifying elements of any person, living, or dead without appropriate permission.

The Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research (PSBR), its staff, officers, directors, members, volunteers (collectively, Released Parties), are not responsible for incorrect or inaccurate entry of information, human error, technical malfunction, lost/delayed data transmission, omission, interruption, deletion, defect, line failure of any telephone, computer or other network, computer equipment, software or any combination thereof, from problems uploading or downloading any materials from a website, or for late, lost, damaged, misdirected, incorrect or incomplete entry.

For purposes of these Official Rules, receipt of entry occurs when PSBR successfully receives the entry and all required entry documents and information.

WINNER SELECTION: At the end of the Contest Period, judges (members and volunteers of PSBR) will review the eligible Essays, Posters, and Digital Media through multiple rounds of judging. Judges will be required to score each entry on a set list of criteria (the judging rubrics provided on our website). Winners will be notified via email or phone using the contact information provided at the time of entry on or after May 18th of the respective year. Providing an accurate email address and phone number is essential. If the prize or prize notification is returned as unclaimed or undeliverable to such potential winner, such potential winner will forfeit his/her prize and an alternate winner may be selected. If any potential prize winner is found to be ineligible, or if they have not complied with these Official Rules or declines the prize for any reason prior to award, such potential prize winner will be disqualified and an alternate prize winner may be selected.

WINNERS LIST: A list of winners will be publically available on our website www.psbr.org after the judging rounds have been completed. The list may include the winner's first name and last initial and their school. (We will not release the student's full first and last name on our public website). The public website list may be available before each winner is individually notified.

PRIZES: The Middle School Essay Contest offers three (3) cash prizes: 1st Place is awarded \$500; 2nd Place is awarded \$400; 3rd Place is awarded \$300.

The High School Essay Contest offers three (3) cash prizes: 1st Place is awarded \$500; 2nd Place is awarded \$400; 3rd Place is awarded \$300.

The Poster Contest offers a \$100 cash prize and a copy of the yearly calendar featuring posters for at least 12 student winners. Sponsor may decide to increase the amount of poster winners on a year by year basis.

The Digital Media Contest offers three (3) cash prizes: 1st Place is awarded \$500; 2nd Place is awarded \$400; 3rd Place is awarded \$300.

All winners are invited to PSBR's Annual Awards Dinner. Please see website for date of dinner.

All essay and digital media cash prizes will be given in the form of a physical check from the Pennsylvania Society for Biomedical Research. The cash prize for the poster contest may be given in the form of a gift card.

JUDGING CRITERIA: Judging* for the Middle School essay contest will be based on the writer's understanding of the following topics: (1) The biomedical research process (20%); (2) Animal models (20%); (3) Alternative methods/3Rs (20%); (4) Current and future needs (20%); and (5) Format, factual content and bibliography (20%).

Judging* for the High School essay contest will be based on the following areas: (1) Content: addresses the topic, role of animal research is described, includes supporting examples, contains one central idea, and related to health/medicine (20%); (2) Persuasiveness and Originality: material is presented in informative and engaging manner, original perspective and point-of-view (20%); (3) Understanding: sense of complexities and research methods understood, full understanding of topic, full understanding of the biomedical research process and the use of animals in research (20%); (4) Factual content: information is true, facts are backed with references (20%); (5) Format and Bibliography: correct grammar and spelling, consistent paragraph construction, organized, logical progression of thought, typed and does not exceed word limit, works cited or bibliography page included, cover page included (20%).

Judging* for posters will be based on the following areas: (1) Focus: intent and topic are clear and communicated in a clear message (20%); (2) Idea and creativity: illustrations and captions reinforce each other, main ideas presented correctly (20%); (3) Neatness and presentation of poster: legible words drawings, and spelling (20%); (4) Organization and layout: landscape layout, organized in a logical manner (20%); (5) Originality: original and creative, no copyrighted images or logos (20%).

Judging* for digital media will be based on the following areas: (1) Guidelines: is the media 3 minutes or less, does it follow the required guidelines, does it follow the required theme, is the information accurate (20%); (2) Creativity: does the entrant convey their idea, message or thought in an original and imaginative way through their lens, narrative, performance, etc. (20%); (3) Quality: does the information presented clearly make the connection between "biomedical research and my life," does the media convey why the topic is important (20%); (4) Production: is the overall quality of production- including visual and sound elements- acceptable, is the media contest organized in a logical manner (20%); (5) Originality: is the media document original and innovative, replicas of registered characters or logos are not permitted (20%).

*Judges are instructed to look for literate essays, posters, and media that go beyond simply repeating material from literature. Complete judging rubrics are publically available on our website.

PLAGIARISM: Plagiarism is using another person's ideas or words without clearly acknowledging or citing the source of that information. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. All winning essays will be checked with plagiarism software prior to announcing the winners. Any essay deemed to be plagiarized will be disqualified. "Using another person's ideas or expressions in your writing without acknowledging the source constitutes plagiarism.... To plagiarize is to give the impression that you wrote or thought something that you in fact borrowed from someone, and to do so is a violation of professional ethics.... Forms of plagiarism include the failure to give appropriate acknowledgment when repeating another's wording or particularly apt phrase, paraphrasing another's argument, and presenting another's line of thinking..." - Joseph Gibaldi, M.L.A. Style Manual. For more information please reference <http://www.plagiarism.org/> and/or <http://libguides.reynolds.edu/content.php?pid=82915&sid=2227139>

WORKS CITED/BIBLIOGRAPHY: All essay entries must include *either* a works cited page OR a bibliography page at the end of the essay. This page does not count towards the maximum word limit for each essay contest. A works cited page should include only those sources directly cited in the essay. A bibliography page should consist of all sources referenced while writing the essay. The student may choose which format (works cited or bibliography) to include with their entry.

Poster entries do not require a reference page, but they require a signed release form.

Digital Media submissions must include a 5 second screen at the end of the submission that includes a works cited or bibliography. This does not count toward the 3 minute limit. A works cited screen should include only those sources directly cited in the media. A bibliography screen consists of all sources referenced while creating the media. The student or group may choose which format (works cited or bibliography) to include with their entry.

GENERAL LIABILITY RELEASE: By participating in the Contest, each entrant agrees that the Sponsor shall not be responsible or liable for any losses, damages or injuries of any kind resulting from participation in the Contests or in any Contests related activity, or from entrant's acceptance, receipt, possession and/or use or misuse of any prize. By accepting a prize, winners agree to the use of their name, school, and/or city of school by the Sponsor, for advertising and promotional purposes worldwide and in any and all media without additional notice or compensation, where imposing such condition is legal.

If, for any reason, the Contests are not capable of running as planned or any other cause beyond the control of the Sponsor which corrupt or affect the administration, security, fairness, integrity or proper conduct of the Contests, the Sponsor reserves the right in its sole discretion to cancel, terminate, modify, suspend or extend the Contests. In the event of a termination or cancellation, the Sponsor reserves the right to select a winner(s) from among all eligible entries received prior to the termination or cancellation date. In the event the Sponsor is prevented from awarding prizes or continuing with the Contest as planned, the Sponsor shall have the right to modify, suspend, or terminate the Contest.

Any attempt by an entrant or any other individual to deliberately damage the Contests, website or undermine the legitimate operation of the Contest, or to annoy, abuse, threaten or harass any other person in connection with the Contest, is in violation of criminal and civil laws. Should such an attempt be made the Sponsor reserves the right to disqualify the applicable individual and seek damages from any such person to the fullest extent permitted by law.

By entering, entrants agree to comply with these rules. Any entrant who attempts to tamper with these Contests in any way shall be disqualified. In the event of dispute as to who submitted an online entry, the entry will be deemed submitted by the Authorized Account Holder of the e-mail address submitted at the time of entry. "Authorized Account Holder" is defined as the natural person or their parent or guardian assigned to an e-mail address by an Internet access provider, on-line service provider or other organization responsible for assigning email addresses for the domain associated with the email address in question. Additional restrictions may apply.

GENERAL PRIZE CONDITIONS: Cash prize winners shall be solely responsible for any applicable federal, state and/or local taxes and the reporting consequences thereof, and for any other fees or costs associated with the applicable prize. All federal, state and local laws and regulations apply. Contests void where prohibited.

REPRESENTATIONS AND WARRANTIES/INDEMNIFICATION: Each person who enters the Contests represents and warrants as follows: (i) the Essay, Poster, or Digital Media is the entrant's own original, previously unpublished, and previously unproduced work; (ii) the Essay, Poster or Digital Media, as of the date of submission, is not the subject of any actual or threatened litigation or claim; and (iii) the Essay, Poster, or Digital Media does not and will not violate any applicable laws, and is not and will not be defamatory or libelous.

Entrants waive and release PSBR (Sponsor) and Released Parties from any and all claims that entrants may now or hereafter have without further notification or compensation to entrants of any kind, and agree not to instigate, support, maintain, or authorize any action, claim, or lawsuit against PSBR (Sponsor) or Released Parties.

GRANT OF RIGHTS: Each entrant into the Contests permanently grants the Sponsor, without limitations, all present and future rights to the Essay, Poster and/or Digital Media. Each entrant grants the Sponsor rights for use by any and all media and devices.

Sponsor shall have the sole right to edit, modify, cut, rearrange, add to, delete from, copy, reproduce, translate, dub, adapt, publish, and use the content of and elements embodied in the submissions, entries, and the entries themselves, in perpetuity in any and all media, including but not limited to digital and electronic media, computer, audio and audiovisual media (whether now existing or hereafter devised), in any language, throughout the world, and in any manner, for trade, advertising, promotional, commercial or any other purposes without further review, notice, approval, consideration, or compensation. Each entrant hereby acknowledges that such entrant does not reserve any rights in or to the Essay, Poster and/or Digital Media after submission to the Sponsor.

Entrants are authorized to use PSBR's name, logo and other identifying information for use in any submission. PSBR's logo, name, and other identifying information may not be used outside of the submission.

PUBLICITY RELEASE: By participating in the Contests, each entrant permanently grants the Sponsor the right to use the entrant's name, biographical information (ie. school, grade, hometown) and Essay, Poster and/or Digital Media entry, in any and all media and devices for any purpose which the Sponsor deems necessary or desirable, including without limitations, advertising and promotional purposes, whether now known or hereafter devised.

GOVERNING LAW: This Contest is governed, interpreted and enforced by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, without regard to its conflict of laws principals. Any and all legal actions, claims or proceedings arising out of, or in connection with this Contest must be brought in a court of competent jurisdiction in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

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