

2025-2026 Official Entry Form

Patriot's Pen Competition

Must Be Completed by All Contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Grade in School _____ Essay Word Count _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's Name and Email (if applicable) _____

To Be Completed by Student's Parent/Guardian

(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____ Date _____

() _____ Parent/Guardian Daytime Phone _____

Parent/Guardian Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Patriot's Pen Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairman's Signature _____ Post # _____

VFW Auxiliary President's/Chairman's Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of participants _____ No. of winners _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarships awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (Banquet, Pins, etc.) \$ _____



To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that this student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Patriot's Pen Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department finals.

District Chairman's Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department

I certify that this student named in the previous section is the duly selected first place winner of the Patriot's Pen Contest Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairman's Signature _____ Dist. # _____

() _____ Email _____

The winner has been will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____

Local VFW Post Information

Contact _____

Phone _____ Best Time To Call _____

Alternate Contact _____

Phone _____ Best Time To Call _____

For assistance contact:

816.756.3390 ext. 6787

Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

vfw.org

VFW STORE ORDER NO. 4440

Student Entry Deadline: Oct. 31, 2025

Patriotic Written Essay Competition

Grand Prize: \$5,000 Scholarship



2025-2026 Theme
"How Are You Showing Patriotism
and Support for Our Country?"

What is the Patriot's Pen Program?

Conducted nationwide, this VFW-sponsored youth essay competition gives students an opportunity to write essays expressing their views on an annual patriotic theme. We invite you to join the more than 60,000 students who participated last year in this contest.

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, State and national level. Department (state) winners receive a portion of \$55,000 in national awards. National Winners will receive at least \$500. The first place national award is currently \$5,000.

The Internal Revenue Service requires a recipient awarded more than \$599 be given Form 1099 identifying the proceeds as taxable income. This may require the winner to provide their social security number.

How Does the Contest Work?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post.

The contest consists of four levels. The first level (entry) is sponsored by VFW Posts. Post winners advance, one for every 15 entries, to the VFW District (regional) level where the one first place winner is advanced to the VFW Department (state) level. The first place winner at the Department level is then advanced into the VFW national competition.

Who Can Enter?

Patriot's Pen is open to 6th, 7th and 8th-grade students enrolled by the Oct. 31 deadline in public, private or parochial schools in the U.S., its territories or its possessions. Homeschooled students also are eligible. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application which has not been denied) and intends to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. (Foreign exchange students are ineligible.)

How Do I Get Started?

- Ask a teacher or youth group/club adult leader to supervise the Patriot's Pen writing contest.
- Contact a participating VFW Post and indicate your interest in participating.
- Establish a contact person who is a member of that VFW Post or its VFW Auxiliary.
- Make sure that your essay is submitted to the VFW Post before the contest deadline of Oct. 31, 2024. You can submit your essay and entry form electronically (by email) upon the Post's approval. Entries sent to the VFW National Headquarters directly will be returned.

How Am I Judged?

Knowledge of the theme is worth 30 points:
You must show a thorough knowledge of the theme in your work. Demonstrate you have researched the issue extensively.

Theme development is worth 35 points:

Answer all relevant facts about the theme such as the who, what, where, when and why. Relate the theme to your own experiences.

Clarity of ideas is worth 35 points:

Write your essay in an easy-to-understand format. Leave your reader with a clear understanding of your explanation of the theme.

What is the theme?

VFW's Commander-in-Chief annually chooses the year's theme. The 2025-2026 theme is:

"How Are You Showing Patriotism and Support for Our Country?"

Deadline Information

To qualify, all entries must be submitted to a sponsoring VFW Post by midnight Oct. 31, 2025.

Note:

If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions:

First, visit vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find a VFW Post."

If you don't have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble contacting them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) headquarters office to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit vfw.org/ContactUs to look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state office's phone number and email.

What Are the Rules?

- You must write your own essay.
- All essays should be typed in English with no color or graphics. 300 - 400 words in length (+ or - 5 word max). Every word is counted regardless of length. The essay title (theme) or added footnotes do not contribute to the word count.
- In no way may contestants identify themselves within their essay (including, but not limited to, your name, school, city, state, race or national origin.) Do not put your name on the essay. The entry form is your essays cover sheet. Secure the Official Student Entry Form with a staple or other fastener on top of your essay. Contestants are allowed to enter only once each year if otherwise eligible (one Post competition).
- The essay must be contestant's original work and a product of the contestant's own thinking. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The approach to the Patriot's Pen theme should be positive and clearly focused. Poetry is not acceptable. Quotations may be used sparingly if plainly identified wherever used. A contestant's teacher, counselor or parent may check the essay for punctuation, grammar and/or spelling, but the content must remain the contestant's. Contestants will be judged on the basis of their essay alone and are not required to present the essay orally. All essays become the property of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The VFW retains non-exclusive rights to the use of your essay and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.
- At any time during the contest additional participant personal information (i.e. SSN, photo, etc.) could be requested by the VFW.

I Have Read and Understand the Contest Rules

Signature of Student Participant

Date

**For assistance contact
the VFW National Headquarters**

at 816.756.3390 ext. 6787

Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

Participant Agreement for Students Advancing to National Level

If selected as a first-place state winner, I have the consent of my parent/guardian and school to attend the Founding Forward Spirit of America Leadership trip to Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, as a guest of the VFW National Organization. In consideration for permission to participate in the National Voice of Democracy Competition ("Competition"), I do hereby, for myself, for my heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, waive, release and discharge all rights and claims which I have or which may hereafter accrue against the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and their respective officers, agents, successors and assigns from any damages which may be sustained by me in connection with my participation in or association with the Competition and/or arising out of any travel related to the Competition. In the event of sickness, accident or injury in connection with the Competition, I consent to and accept the services of a duly licensed medical, surgical or dental specialist selected on my behalf and for such treatments, as they may deem necessary. I understand that VFW will not be liable for such treatment. I further understand that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States retains non-exclusive rights to use my audio file, essay, name and likeness in the promotion and execution of the organization's programs and activities.

To Be Completed by the VFW Post

I certify that this student has an authorized entry in our VFW Post level Voice of Competition.

Post Commander's/Chairperson's Signature _____ Post# _____

VFW Auxiliary President's/Chairperson's Signature (if applicable) _____

Post Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

VFW Post Email _____

No. of students participating _____

No. of winners advanced to Districts _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. scholarships awards \$ _____

Amt. of Post/Aux. additional expenses (Banquet, Pins, etc.) \$ _____

To Be Completed by the VFW District

I certify that this student named in the previous section is the duly selected winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest District Competition and is our sole entry into the Department finals.

District Chairperson's Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

To Be Completed by the VFW Department Chairperson

I certify that this student named in the previous section is the duly selected first place winner of the Voice of Democracy Contest Department Competition and is our sole entry into the National Judging.

Department Chairperson's Signature _____ Dist. # _____

Phone _____ Email _____

The winner has been will be (check one) notified that they are the first-place Department winner on _____

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

Proudly Sponsored By



TWISTED X

Student Entry Deadline: October 31, 2025
Patriotic Audio Essay Competition

Grand Prize: \$35,000 Scholarship

For assistance contact:

816.756.3390 ext. 6155

Email: youthscholarships@vfw.org

vfw.org

VFW STORE ORDER NO. 4420

LOCAL VFW POST INFORMATION

CONTACT: _____

PHONE: _____

BEST TIME TO CALL: _____

ALTERNATE CONTACT: _____

PHONE: _____

BEST TIME TO CALL: _____

VFW

VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS.

VOICE OF DEMOCRACY

2025-2026 Theme:
"How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?"



What is the Voice of Democracy Program?

Since 1947, the Voice of Democracy has been the Veterans of Foreign Wars' (VFW's) premier scholarship program. Each year, nearly 25,000 high school students compete for more than \$2 million in scholarships and incentives. Students compete by writing and recording an audio essay on an annual patriotic theme. This year's theme is, "How Are You Showing Patriotism And Support For Our Country?"

Why Should I Enter?

Prizes and scholarships can be awarded at the Post, District, State and National level. National winners will be notified of their scholarship & placement.

The Rules

Who can enter?

The Voice of Democracy is open to students in grades 9-12 by the Oct. 31 deadline, who are enrolled in a public, private or parochial high school or home study program in the United States, its territories and possessions. Although U.S. citizenship is not required, students must be lawful U.S. permanent residents or have applied for permanent residence (the application for which has not been denied) and intends to become a U.S. citizen at the earliest opportunity allowed by law. Foreign exchange students, students age 20 or over, GED or Adult Education Students are not eligible for entry.

What do I need to enter?

Record your original 3-5 minute (+ or - 5 second max.) audio essay on a flash drive, or other electronic device. You will submit the recording, typed essay and this completed entry form. Provide these items to your school/group competition or VFW Post for judging. In addition you can submit your emailed entry form, essay, and audio file to the VFW Post upon approval. You must be the sole author of your essay. Inappropriate use of ChatGPT or other AI tools is not allowed. The recording must be in your own voice and in English. Hearing/speech impaired students should email the Voice of Democracy National Office at youthscholarships@vfw.org for special instructions. No music, singing, poetry or sound effects are allowed. To ensure fairness and impartiality in judging, essays must be anonymous. Please do not include your name, address, school name, or any other personal identifiers in the body of your essay. Additionally, avoid references to your race, sex, religion, national origin, or other specific personal characteristics that could reveal your identity. General references to nationality or patriotic identity (such as being an American or referencing American values) are permitted if they are relevant to the essay theme. However, personal identifiers tied to your individual background or experience should be avoided.

You may enter only one competition at one Post (if otherwise eligible) per year. At any time during the contest, additional participant personal information could be requested by the VFW, including but not limited to a photograph, SSN, or biographical information.

Where Do I Submit My Entry?

All entries begin at the VFW Post level. The only exception is where schools/classes/youth groups have large numbers of students and wish to conduct their own competition, submitting one winner for each 15 students to the VFW Post. Individual students may submit their entry directly to the Post. Entries sent to VFW National will be returned. One winner for every 15 entries from each Post advances to District and one District winner advances to the state (Department) competition. If you need help finding a participating VFW Post, follow these instructions: First, visit this website vfw.org/FindaPost to "Find A VFW Post." If you do not have success in finding a Post, or if you have trouble getting in touch with them, you can contact your VFW Department (state) to see if they can offer any information or assistance. You can visit this link vfw.org/ContactUs and look for "Find a State Contact" to get your VFW state phone number and Email.

If you still need assistance, please Email us at VFW National Headquarters: youthscholarships@vfw.org

What is the Deadline for My Entry?

All entries competing at the Post level must be in the hands of that VFW Post by midnight, Oct. 31. It is the responsibility of the student to meet this deadline by submitting their entry to the proper location by ensuring it is a participating Post.

What Are the Judging Criteria?

Originality is worth 35 points:

Treatment of the theme should show imagination and human interest.

Content is worth 30 points:

Clearly express your ideas in an organized manner. Fully develop your theme and use transitions to move smoothly from one idea to another.

Delivery is worth 35 points:

Speak in a clear and credible manner.

2025-2026 Official Voice of Democracy Competition Entry Form

Must be completed by ALL contestants

Name: First, M.I., Last _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

() Phone _____ Email _____

Date of Birth (mm/dd/yy) _____ Age _____ Jacket Size _____

School Name, City, State _____

Teacher's Name and Email (if applicable) Nearest Airport: _____

To be completed by Student's Parent/Guardian
(Required even if student is 18 or over)

Parent/Guardian Name (Printed) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

() _____ Date _____
Parent/Guardian's Daytime Phone

Parent/Guardian's Email _____

I Have Read and Understand the Rules and Participant Agreement
(On opposite side)

I certify that I am the sole author of the enclosed audio/essay entry. I have not inappropriately used any AI tools or ChatGPT. I have only entered the competition once yearly if otherwise eligible. I understand that if it is found that I have entered any other Post's competition or used this essay for another VFW competition, I face elimination from the competition and will return any and all prizes or incentives awarded.

Signature of Student Participant _____

Date _____

