

UI FLASH WRITING CONTEST RULES (2026)

The University of Iowa Center for Advancement Privacy Statement

At the UI Center for Advancement, we are committed to being good stewards of your personal information and ensuring it is collected, used, and secured appropriately. The UI Center for Advancement Privacy Statement may be read in its entirety on our website. The information in this privacy statement summarizes our policy, procedures, and practices as it relates to your personal information. If you have any questions or comments about our privacy practices or compliance efforts, please call 1-800-982-4295 or email privacy@foriowa.org.

Minor Contestants

The parent or legal guardian of any minors (defined as ages 0–17) interested in participating in the contest must complete the registration form and provide consent to the UI Center for Advancement to collect and use the minor's information. If consent is not provided, the minor will not be allowed to participate in the contest. The information to be collected and used includes the minor's: first name, last initial, state or country, and contest entry.

Information on "minors" collected will be expunged once the contest has concluded.

If a minor should win in their age group (grades 3 & 4, grades 5 & 6, grades 7 & 8, grades 9–12, and current UI student), then the minor's first name, first letter of their last name, state or country, (e.g., Jane D., Iowa) and their entry will be posted to the contest website. The prize will be sent to the parent/legal guardian completing the registration form to the provided address.

Eligibility to Participate

The contest is free and open to UI alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends. Entrants must submit their entry between Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST, and Sunday, Jan. 18, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST. Once the registration is completed online, an automatic confirmation will be displayed.

Contest Schedule

The contest begins Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST, and runs through Sunday, Jan. 18, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST. The winners will be announced on Wednesday, Feb. 11, 2026.

Story Assignments

Writers must create an original story—in 1,000 words or less—and incorporate one of two prompts that will be posted on the contest website on Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST. Each prompt will include a genre, character, and specific object.

All stories must be created within the competition period and focus on one of the two prompts (elements may not be switched between the two prompts).

Potential genres are action/adventure, comedy, crime caper, drama, fairy tale, fantasy, ghost story, historical fiction, horror, mystery, open, political satire, romance, romantic comedy, sci-fi, spy, suspense, and thriller. The assigned character (e.g., hairdresser) must be the predominant

character used in the story. The assigned object must physically appear at some point in the story. For example, if your assigned object is a coffee mug, the actual object must appear in the story rather than a character simply mentioning a coffee mug or the words “coffee mug” appearing as the name of an establishment, in a letter, or on a sign.

Deadline and Submission Format

- **Deadline:** Completed stories must be received by Sunday, Jan. 18, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST. All entries not received by the UI Center for Advancement by that time will be ineligible.
- **Length:** The maximum length for each short story is 1,000 words. Entries with more than 1,000 words will be disqualified.
- **File format:** The story must be uploaded as a Word document (.doc), text file (.txt), or rich text format document (.rtf). Stories submitted in Apple’s Pages format will not be accepted. The name of the file must be the title of the story. For example, if the title of your short story is “Autumn,” then the name of your file must be “Autumn.doc,” “Autumn.txt,” or Autumn.rtf.”
- **Font:** Submissions must be typed in 12-point Courier, New Courier, or Times New Roman typeface.
- **Anonymity:** The author’s name must not appear anywhere in the short story document. The author’s name will be submitted only on the web entry form.
- **How to submit:** Stories must be uploaded through the [contest website](#) or submitted via email to write.now@foriowa.org.

Contestants may submit only one entry for this contest.

Judging:

Entries will be judged on format; spelling and grammar; and the story (use of one prompt, writing, originality, character development, and plot development).

The age categories include grades 3 & 4, grades 5 & 6, grades 7 & 8, grades 9–12, current University of Iowa students, adult (University of Iowa Alumni), and adult (Friends of the University). One winner will be selected from each category.

Feedback on the individual entries will not be provided at the end of the contest.

Creative Development

All creative development for stories must take place during the contest’s entry window, from Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST, to Sunday, Jan. 18, 2026, at 4 p.m. CST. All decisions as to compliance with the contest’s entry window are within the sole discretion of the UI Center for Advancement; and any such decisions by the UI Center for Advancement are final, conclusive, and binding upon all entrants. The UI Center for Advancement reserves the right to disqualify any entries that are plagiaristic or otherwise unoriginal to the corresponding entrant.

Winners’ Prizes

Winners in each of the grade-school categories will receive a writing prize pack and a \$25 Bookshop.org gift card. Winners in the current UI student category and both adult categories will each receive a \$50 Bookshop.org gift card and a handcrafted wooden pen carved from the branch of a tree that is located on the University of Iowa campus. In addition, the top entry (and a few honorable mentions) in each age category will be posted to the Write Now website.