

Discourse, debate, and analysis

Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition 2025

Official Essay Guideline



Cambridge Centre
for International Research

About the Competition

The spirit of the **Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition** is to encourage critical thinking and exploration of thought-provoking and often controversial topics.

Sponsored by the Cambridge Centre for International Research (CCIR), the competition covers a diverse array of subjects, from historical and present issues to speculative future scenarios. Participants are invited to engage deeply with these topics, critically analysing their various facets and implications. It promotes intellectual exploration and encourages participants to challenge established norms and beliefs, presenting opportunities to envision alternative futures, consider the consequences of new technologies, and reevaluate long standing traditions.

Ultimately, our aim is to create a platform for students and scholars to share their perspectives on pressing issues of the past and future, with the hope of broadening our collective understanding and generating innovative solutions to contemporary challenges. It aims to underscore the importance of discourse, debate, and critical analysis in addressing complex societal issues.

About the Essay Prompts

We've collaborated closely with **esteemed academics and professors hailing from renowned universities** to curate an array of thought-provoking prompts. These questions are meticulously selected as they address pivotal and significant themes that resonate across various disciplines. Crafted by experts in their respective fields, these prompts are designed to spark reflection, challenging participants to explore, analyse, and offer insights into some of the most pressing and crucial inquiries shaping our world today.

What is the judging process and judging criteria?

All submissions will be reviewed by a judging panel with scholars drawn from prestigious institutions, including Harvard, Cambridge, Oxford, and MIT.

Double-Blind Review

The Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition 2025 will employ a double-blind review system for its judging process.

The identities of both the authors and the reviewers are concealed. This means that reviewers are unaware of the author's identity, academic affiliation, or reputation, and similarly, authors do not know who is reviewing their work. This anonymity helps in minimising biases that could influence the review process. Such biases may arise from various factors like the author's reputation, institutional affiliation, or even previous interactions in the academic community.

By implementing a double-blind review process, the Re:think essay competition aims to create a more equitable environment where essays are judged solely on their content, quality, and adherence to the competition's criteria, rather than any external factors related to the author's identity or status. This approach enhances the integrity of the judging process and promotes a merit-based evaluation of the submitted works.

Original and interesting ideas

The competition is designed to inspire students to deeply reconsider and reflect on the intricate relationships between science, society, and the global environment. Original thoughts and perspectives are greatly encouraged.

However, it's important to clarify what we mean by 'original idea'. Participants are not expected to come up with a concept that no one has ever thought of before. Instead, essays can advocate for an existing viewpoint, provided they do so with compelling and thought-provoking arguments. Additionally, essays can offer new analyses or insights into the issues at hand, thereby contributing fresh perspectives to current discussions.

Quality of Argument and Writing

Clear writing and well-supported arguments are crucial. This means that essays should be well-structured, with each claim or argument supported by evidence or logical reasoning. Additionally, the judges will consider the style of writing, which includes language use, idea flow, and overall engagement with the topics.

Plagiarism and AI Assistance

The competition has a strict policy against plagiarism and the use of AI writing assistance. Essays found to have such content will be disqualified. This means students must ensure their work is entirely their own.

What are we looking for in a good essay?

A good essay takes many forms—and there are no real formulas we can offer on how to write one. That being said, we wanted to offer some general guidelines for what we think are, in general, the features of a good essay. These guidelines serve as a framework to help participants craft compelling essays for the competition. While emphasising critical analysis, originality, evidence-based arguments, clarity, and creative thinking, it's important to note that these are guidelines rather than strict rules. We encourage participants to experiment, think innovatively, and explore diverse approaches to their topics. The aim is to inspire intellectual exploration without confining ideas within rigid boundaries, fostering a space where creative expression and unconventional perspectives are celebrated.

With all that, when we think about a good essay, we are usually thinking of an essay that demonstrates:

- 1. Critical Analysis:** Demonstrate a strong ability to analyse and evaluate the topic critically. This involves breaking down the subject matter into its constituent parts, examining each aspect thoroughly, and considering its implications from multiple perspectives. Highlight the underlying assumptions, strengths, weaknesses, and potential consequences associated with the topic.
- 2. Originality and Depth:** Strive to present unique insights and delve deeply into the intricacies of the topic. Avoid reiterating commonly held opinions; instead, offer fresh perspectives or angles that haven't been widely explored. Delve into the nuances and complexities of the subject matter, considering its implications beyond the surface level.
- 3. Evidence and Research:** Support your arguments and claims with robust evidence from reputable sources. Conduct thorough research using credible academic references, scholarly articles, historical data, or empirical studies. Incorporate data-driven insights and relevant examples to strengthen your essay's credibility.
- 4. Clarity and Structure:** Ensure your essay is well-organised and easy to follow. Begin with a clear introduction that sets the stage for your discussion, followed by a structured body that logically presents your arguments and evidence. Use transitions to create a seamless flow between ideas and conclude succinctly, summarising your key points without introducing new information.

5. Critical Thinking and Creativity: Encourage unconventional thinking and imaginative approaches to the topic. Challenge conventional wisdom by exploring alternative viewpoints or proposing innovative solutions. Apply creative thinking to address the complexities of the subject matter, fostering a unique perspective that stands out in the discourse.

6. Form and Style: Pay attention to the essay's structure and writing style. Strive for a cohesive and engaging narrative that captivates the reader. Experiment with different writing styles, ensuring clarity, coherence, and an appropriate tone that resonates with the subject matter. Consider using vivid language, effective metaphors, and eloquent prose to enhance the essay's impact.

How should I get started with the essay?

Getting started is often the most challenging part. Here's some general advice on how to get started.

1. Select a Topic that Resonates with You

This is arguably the most important step. Choose a topic that genuinely interests you or evokes your curiosity. Your passion for the subject will drive your motivation to delve deeper and explore it comprehensively.

2. Read Relevant Materials

Do some research. Good thinking always stands on the shoulders of giants. Engage with a variety of sources—academic papers, articles, books, and credible online resources—to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. This diverse reading will provide you with multiple perspectives and help you form a well-rounded viewpoint.

3. Think for Yourself

Dare to present a fresh perspective or an unconventional argument. Originality often stems from challenging established ideas, so don't shy away from presenting an idea that challenges the norm.

4. Look for Support

A good essay will support your thesis with credible evidence and logical reasoning. Use data, examples, expert opinions, and well-reasoned arguments to bolster your position and lend credibility to your essay.

5. Question Yourself

A good essay will also preempt counterarguments and engage with alternative positions. In other words, in your essay, you should do your best to acknowledge and address opposing viewpoints. Engaging with counterarguments demonstrates a nuanced understanding of the topic and strengthens your essay's credibility by showcasing a well-rounded analysis.

6. Plan the Process

Break down the process into manageable steps, and don't be discouraged by initial drafts. Keep refining your ideas, seek feedback, and revise your work to create a compelling and well-supported essay.

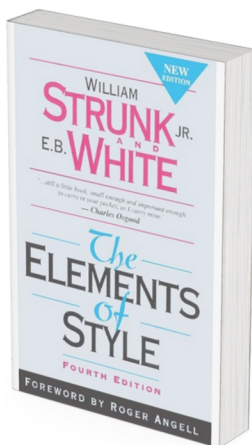
The Re:Think Writing Workshop

The Re:Think Writing Workshop is a monthly online Zoom session designed to support prospective essay writers as they get started on their essays. In the session, participants will find guidelines on how to write an essay for the Cambridge Re:think Essay Competition. This guideline aims to help participants become better thinkers – engaging with the essay prompt at a deeper level – and to improve their writing skills.

Led by experienced PhD writing mentors, these sessions offer participants valuable guidance on both the structure and substance of their essays. Writers have the opportunity to engage in interactive discussions, receive personalised advice, and explore various approaches to enhance the form, style, and content of their work. These sessions aim to foster a collaborative environment where aspiring writers can refine their ideas, improve their writing, and receive expert feedback to craft compelling and impactful essays for the competition.

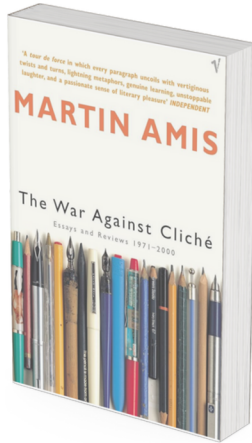
Reading list:

There are dozens of books on the market about how to write well. Here are four which we believe are especially useful, and why:



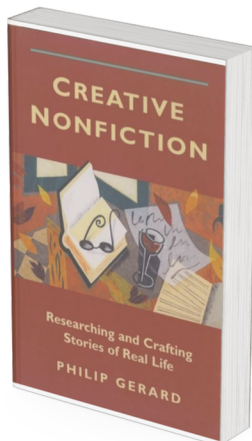
The Elements of Style by Strunk and White:

- Offers concise rules and principles for clear and effective writing, focusing on grammar, style, and usage.
- Provides timeless advice on brevity, clarity, and the importance of omitting needless words, making it a foundational guide for writers.



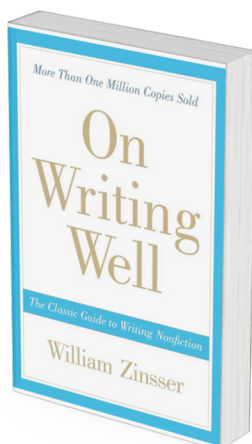
The War against Cliché: Essays and Reviews 1971-2000 by Martin Amis:

- Presents a collection of essays and reviews that challenge clichéd thinking and encourage originality in writing.
- Offers diverse insights into literature, language, and culture, inspiring writers to break away from conventional tropes and explore innovative approaches.



Writing Creative Nonfiction by Philip Gerard:

- Guides writers in crafting compelling narratives within the realm of nonfiction while maintaining accuracy and authenticity.
- Offers techniques for blending creativity with factual storytelling, providing practical advice for writers exploring the creative possibilities of nonfiction.



On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction by William Zinsser:

- Emphasises simplicity, clarity, and sincerity in nonfiction writing, encouraging writers to develop their unique voice.
- Covers various aspects of nonfiction writing, from structure and style to the importance of revision, serving as a comprehensive and accessible resource for aspiring writers.

Submission Guidelines

- All essays should be submitted through the Re:think Essay Competition program on the **CCIR admissions portal** (https://ccir.smapply.org/prog/cambridge_rethink_2025/) by the deadline indicated on the site.
- Please ensure that your essay does not exceed 2000 words; this word count excludes footnotes and bibliography.
- Please use a consistent font format and set the line spacing to 1.5 space.
- All submissions will be routed through a plagiarism and an AI checker. As such, we expect all submissions to be properly cited. The format of citation for this competition is MLA 8, the 8th edition of the Modern Language Association style. To find out more about MLA 8, please refer to this guide [here](#).
- The essay must be submitted in PDF format. In the PDF document, please remove your name, affiliation, or any personal information to ensure a blind review. You will be asked to provide personal information in the submission system.

Checklist Before Submission

Before submitting your essay, please review the following checklist to ensure your essay meets all the necessary criteria:

- ✓ **Essay Structure:** Is my essay clearly organised and well-structured? Does it flow logically from one point to the next?
- ✓ **Word Count and Format:** Does my essay adhere to the 2000-word limit, excluding footnotes and bibliography? Is the line spacing set to 1.5?
- ✓ **Argument Support:** Are my arguments well-supported with evidence and reasoning? Have I provided sufficient justification for my viewpoints?
- ✓ **Clarity and Accuracy:** Have I carefully checked for typos and ambiguities? Is my language clear and precise?

- ✓ **Anonymity for Blind Review:** Have I removed my name and any affiliation from the essay itself? (Note: You will be asked to provide your personal information in the submission system, but the essay document should not contain any personal identifiers to ensure a fair and unbiased review process.)
- ✓ **Title:** Does my essay have a clear and relevant title?
- ✓ **Citation and Referencing:** Have I properly cited all sources? Are all references accurately documented, including author names and sources?
- ✓ **Adherence to MLA 8:** Am I using the 8th edition of the Modern Language Association (MLA) style for citations and references?
- ✓ **Inclusion of References:** Have I included a complete list of references at the end of my essay?

Annotated Winning Essay

Please find an officially annotated winning essay on the following page. The annotations have been kindly prepared by a CCIR Programme Coordinator currently affiliated with Stanford University.



**If you need help,
contact us.**

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