



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

2026 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 2026 Essay Competition in the series *Young Voices in the Chemical Sciences for Sustainability*. The theme for the 2026 competition is:

How can the chemical sciences ensure sustainable access to clean water for all needs?

Competition Rules

1. The Competition is open globally to entrants who are under 35 years of age on the closing date 31 March 2026. 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).
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 main title, Figure or Table titles, Statement on use of AI, or references in the word count). Any that do 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 (See Rule 6 below).
5. As part of the evaluation:
 - All essays will be examined for evidence that AI has been used in the primary writing of the text, which is not permitted. AI may only be used in the preparation of the essay for improving the grammar and clarity of the text and NOT for the initial writing of text or creation of Figures or Tables.
 - 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.
6. Literature references to indicate sources should be given in full in the format required by the journal *RSC Sustainability*. Every reference must include an active web link to where the cited material can be found – either as:
 - a DOI (e.g., <https://doi.org/10.1021/acssuschemeng.2c03159>)
 - or as a URL (e.g., <http://www.iocd.org/Essay/competition2023.shtml>). For all URL citations, the latest date of access must be stated.RSC Referencing Guidelines can be found, for example, at: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/library-guides-to-citing-referencing/attachments/royal-society-chemistry-style-guide.pdf>.
Note: the DOI or URL on its own is NOT sufficient – the full citation giving the authors/publication details must be included.
7. Only original Tables or Figures may be included. 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 return for improvement, or rejected. The drawing package used for producing original figures should be stated.
8. The essay must contain a *Statement on the Use of AI*, in conformity with the above rules and RSC publication [requirements](#), immediately before the References This text does not count as part of the 1500 word limit.

/continued

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. In stage 2, those essays shortlisted will be subjected to a second 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
 - 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 a few words of text.
 - A revised text responding to any request for clarification of text, references, Figures, Tables, or other details pertinent to the next round of judging.

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 2025 [listing](#) of country regions. 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 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. Individual shortlisted entries will also be featured from time to time on IOCD's website.
3. Both **Regional Winners and Finalists** will be encouraged to prepare short videos which summarise the main messages in their essays. Selected videos will be featured 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. Entry Forms are available on the IOCD website here: https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/Essay/competition2026.html
- These two documents must be emailed to the Essay Manager at: essay@iocd.org, to be received **not later than midnight on 31 March 2026**. In the subject line of your email, please write:
2026 Essay Competition Entry: [firstname LASTNAME]
e.g., 2026 Essay Competition Entry: Angela BROWN

/continued

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. Entrants should create their own title for their essay, related to the theme set. 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 those related to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals or to specific international challenges such as climate change, clean energy, sustainable production or critical resource shortages. Whatever framing of the problem 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. Entrants are encouraged to take a wide, global perspective, including reflecting on the intersection of science, society and policy aspects, rather than to describe a particular scientific advance in great technical detail.
- **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 AND correct use of RSC style for referencing.**
- **Compliance with the requirements that plagiarism has been avoided and that no use has been made of AI in the primary writing of text or creation of Figures or Tables.** AI may only be used in the preparation of the essay for improving the grammar and clarity of text that has been written by the entrant.

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 Regional Winners, which can be found here:

https://www.iocd.org/v3_site/Sources/essay_competition.html

Entrants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the last minute before submitting their forms and essays. This will ensure that any irregularities in format, wordcount or information missing can be communicated back to the entrant with time for revised versions to be submitted. **Revisions received after the deadline will NOT be accepted.**

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 2026 Competition should be addressed to the Essay Manager at: essay@iocd.org**
- **Entries for the 2026 Competition should be emailed to the Essay Manager at: essay@iocd.org**