

Judging Rubric

This Judging Rubric will be used as a guide to rank the essays. Feel free to distribute to judges and participating students.

	Exceptional	Capable	Developing	Needs Improvement
ORGANIZATION/CLARITY	<p>The arrangement of examples and commentary enhances the writer's central argument. Ideas and arguments progress logically and effectively and clearly connect to the main thesis.</p> <p>All parts of the essay contribute to a single overall argument.</p>	<p>The organization of commentary and examples helps to convey the writer's central argument.</p> <p>Most parts of the essay contribute to a single argument, but there may be some extraneous details or commentary.</p>	<p>The organization of commentary and examples cloud the writer's central argument; some rearrangement would help.</p> <p>There are several areas of the essay that do not relate to the main insight. There may be some areas that are contradictory.</p>	<p>The organization is ineffective in revealing a central argument. Paragraphs do not clearly connect to one another.</p> <p>The essay is often contradictory without intending to be.</p>
CONTENT/INSIGHT	<p>Essay contains exceptional insights and complex ideas. The writer demonstrates a deep, fresh understanding of the subject.</p> <p>Provides relevant, substantial, concrete and genuine examples that clearly support the central argument.</p>	<p>Essay contains some insights. The writer demonstrates an adequate understanding of the subject, but some ideas could have been explored further.</p> <p>Provides reasonable and predictable examples that develop the central argument.</p>	<p>Main argument of the essay is simplistic. The paper may be contradictory or too broad, rather than making a simple point.</p> <p>Some examples are useful but others may not illustrate the main point. Examples need further development.</p>	<p>Main argument of the essay is limited or unclear.</p> <p>Provides few or irrelevant examples to support an undeveloped or unclear central argument.</p>
STUDENT VOICE/STYLE	<p>Shows exceptional awareness of audience, control of voice, variety in sentence structure, sophisticated word choice, and smooth transitions.</p>	<p>Shows awareness of audience, control of voice, some variety in sentence structure and word choice with some smooth transitions.</p>	<p>Shows inconsistent awareness of audience, simplistic word choice, little variety of sentence structure, and limited use of transitions.</p>	<p>Shows limited awareness of audience, minimal or incorrect word choice, little or no variety of sentence structure, and few or no transitions.</p>
MECHANICS/CONVENTIONS	<p>Free from errors in grammar, usage, and the conventions of written English.</p>	<p>May have a few errors in grammar, usage, or conventions of written English; these errors do not cause confusion.</p>	<p>May have errors in grammar, usage, or conventions of written English; these errors may lead to some confusion.</p>	<p>May have a variety of repeated errors in sentence structure, grammar, usage, and the conventions of written English; these errors often cause confusion.</p>

Judging Information

Judges for the American Dream Essay Contest determine the prize winners. Anonymity is essential. By the time the judges see the essays, they will have been given an anonymous number and WILL NOT have the student's name on them. If a judge sees a student's name on an essay it is critical that they bring this to the attention of the committee immediately. DO NOT have them read the essay until it is returned to them with the student's name removed. Also, before judges read the essays, be sure to mark over or black out any identifying information such as High School name, town, etc.

Judge Requirements

A judge must be someone capable of comprehending and appreciating the purpose of *The American Dream Essay Contest*. Essays should be judged on content. A judge should be able to evaluate an essay for clarity, its general organization and how compelling it is, but the judge need NOT necessarily be a "grammar expert" or English teacher. Judges must not be a parent or relative of a current contest participant. Judges should not meet together to judge the essays and should not discuss their choices with each other. Each judge should read through each essay and place them in order from exceptional to needs improvement. The judge should then complete the tally sheet (provided). All the judge's tally sheets together are used to complete the overall contest tally sheet (provided). The essay with the lowest numeric score is the 1st place winner.

Essay Criteria

Please refer to the Judging Rubric as well as the criteria below, to guide your ranking decisions.

- **High Importance: Content**

- A Cowboy Ethic/Code of the West Principle. Students were given the following writing prompt:

Take a moment to read and reflect upon the "Ten Principles to Live By" as described in James P. Owens' book, *Cowboy Ethics*:

1. Live each day with courage
2. Take pride in your work
3. Always finish what you start
4. Do what has to be done
5. Be tough, but fair
6. When you make a promise, keep it
7. Ride for the brand
8. Talk less and say more
9. Remember that some things aren't for sale
10. Know where to draw the line
11. *Create your own personal ethical belief*

As you reflect on your life so far, *describe* how one of the “Ten Principles to Live By,” or your own personal ethical belief, has been a driving or guiding force in your life. Whether a part of your internal guidance from within, the decisions you make every day, or how they inspire the decisions you make for the benefit of your future, define ‘what it means to me’ in 300-2,000 words.

Has the student fulfilled the purpose of the essay?

- Positive and life-affirming. Does the essay show a respect for life and people?
- Universal appeal. Would most people agree that this is an important law of life?

- **Other Judging Criteria:**

Presentation

- Compelling. Does the essay move you in some way? Are you persuaded by what they have written?
- Clarity. Can you tell what the student means?
- Flow. Does one thought flow into the next?

Grammar and Spelling

- Grammar and spelling are not of utmost importance; unless a high number of glaring mistakes are present that suggest a careless and hastily written essay where the basic concept and flow of the essay are difficult to understand.