

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the essay need to be exactly 500 words?

No, the 500 word length is a guideline, not an exact word limit. Students will not be penalized for essays slightly over or under 500 words. It is possible that an essay that is significantly shorter or longer could lose points if the length affects the organization of the essay.

Is the contest only open to girls?

The contest is open to both girls and boys. We hope to inspire all students to explore STEM fields and feel that it is beneficial for all students to learn about the achievements of these notable scientists and engineers, most of whom they would not otherwise learn about in school.

Why do I need to include the number of 6th graders at the school?

This number is used to determine which schools are awarded a book prize for high participation (20% or more participating). These books are great additions to school or classroom libraries and can be used as a resource for future contests.

How will I know whether my/my student's submission was received?

You will receive an email confirmation that the submission has been received. Please contact us at EssayContestSWERMS@gmail.com if you do not receive a confirmation within 48 hours of submitting the essay electronically or within 5 days of submitting the essay by mail.

When will the results be announced?

The contest results will be announced in early April after two rounds of judging. The announcement will be sent to participating teachers by email and will be posted on the SWE-RMS website. Prizes will be mailed to teachers shortly after the announcement.

Can you suggest some resources for the students?

Check your school or classroom library for book participation prizes from past years. These books all include biographies of female scientists/engineers and may include some of this year's subjects. Some previous titles include:

- Headstrong: 52 Women Who Changed Science - and the World
- Magnificent Minds: 16 Pioneering Women in Science and Medicine
- Remarkable Minds: 16 More Women in Science and Medicine
- A to Z of Women in Science
- Changing Our World: True Stories of Women Engineers
- Women in Engineering: Pioneers and Trailblazers
- Women at the Edge of Discovery: 40 True Science Adventures
- Women in Space: 23 Stories of First Flights, Scientific Missions, and Gravity-Breaking Adventures

Online and print encyclopedias also work well for these essays. For online research, encourage students to look for sources beyond Wikipedia – biographies of these women can often be found on the websites of professional societies, universities, or agencies like NASA.

The essay contest is a good opportunity to introduce bibliographies to students and to discuss how to incorporate information from various sources into an essay without plagiarizing.

What are judges looking for in the essays?

The volunteer judges work off of a detailed rubric, but the general scoring guidelines are listed below. There are two rounds of judging to select the winning essays.

1 Ideas / Content – 20%

Top essays accurately describe a broad range of the subject's achievements (research, awards, and/or prizes) across many years and/or areas with significant detail.

2 Understanding / Interpretation – 20%

Top essays demonstrate understanding of the subject's achievements by providing both facts and relevance (e.g. global impacts, why this person and their achievements are important).

3 Organization – 15%

Top essays have a logical order of information (introduction, body of text, conclusions). Main points are vivid; key information is easy to spot; clear connections between paragraphs.

4 Voice / Word Choice / Sentence Fluency – 15%

Top essays are clearly written in the "voice" of the student. Sentences flow smoothly - could be read aloud. May include anecdotal references to child's own life, which support understanding of impacts of scientist's achievements.

5 Conventions - Grammar, Spelling, and Punctuation – 10%

Top essays have few errors in grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Paragraphs are indented to show where new ideas begin.

6 Presentation/Neatness – 10%

Top essays are neatly laid out with even margins and clear type (or very neat handwriting). Student name and associated information neatly included.

7 Bibliography – 10%

Top essays have three or more references presented in a neat, standard format. At least two different types of resources are used (books, periodicals, internet sources, encyclopedias). Judges are aware that students may be limited to internet sources for some of the more modern subjects.

If you have any additional questions, please contact Sara Ellis at EssayContestSWERMS@gmail.com.