STUDENT GUIDELINES

2026-2027 Four-Way Test Essay Contest Sponsored by Rotary International District 5580
Complete essays and Student Information Forms must be submitted through the District portal by November 30, 2026: https://web-production-9a2ad.up.railway.app
Students, school counselors and Rotary clubs may use the portal for submissions and contest inquiries.
Club-level judging will take place December 1-15, 2026; District-level judging will take place December 16-31, 2026; winners will be announced in early January 2027.

WHAT IS THE FOUR-WAY TEST?

The Four-Way Test of the things we think, say or do is as follows:

1. Is it the **TRUTH**?
2. Is it **FAIR** to all concerned?
3. Will it build **GOODWILL** and **BETTER FRIENDSHIPS**?
4. Will it be **BENEFICIAL** to all concerned?

The Four-Way Test is not a code or a creed, but a **stimulus to self-appraisal**. It is not a pledge, but rather a springboard to voluntary self-improvement. It is not a sermon, although any number of sermons has been preached on it. It aims to encourage the ethical instincts in every person and constitutes a simple and practical guide for people of all cultures.

The Four-Way Test has inspired safe driving programs, fire prevention campaigns, crime and drug reduction activities; it has been the subject of countless secondary school essays. It has been translated into more than 100 languages.

WHY DOES ROTARY DISTRICT 5580 CONDUCT THE FOUR-WAY TEST ESSAY CONTEST? Our Rotarians believe that the thousands of dollars committed are an investment in our youth. It is a statement of our interest in the ideas of our young people. It demonstrates our belief that it is important to reward our youth for expressing their views. And, it is our way to encourage youth to apply the Four-Way Test to the world around them.

PRIZES - Local Rotary clubs may offer local prizes. District awards are: 1st place, $1,500; 2nd place, $1,000; 3rd place, $500; and 4th-7th place, $250 each.

ELIGIBILITY - Open to all students in the final two years of high school. Students with no Rotary club nearby may still enter: choose "There is no Rotary club near me" in the portal, and the District essay chair will match your entry with a sponsoring club.

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TOPIC - Choose a subject meaningful to you. See Sample Topic Areas for optional ideas about service and community life.

ESSAY FORMAT - The essay may focus on one, two, or all four principles of the Four-Way Test. Begin with a 1-3 sentence preamble briefly explaining how the topic relates to all four questions. Explain how the topic made a difference in your life or the life of the person you discuss. Include a title, but no student name or Rotary club identification on the essay. Cite outside sources, quotations and adaptations using footnotes or endnotes. The preamble and reference notes are excluded from the 500-1,000 word count. The essay must be double-spaced.

SUBMISSION - Each entry of 500 to 1,000 words in length is to be uploaded as an electronic Word or PDF copy, double-spaced, through the District 5580 Essay Contest portal by November 30, 2026: https://web-production-9a2ad.up.railway.app. You complete the Student Information Form online in the portal at the same time, including your preamble, your AI disclosure and your typed signature. Complete entries must include both the essay and Student Information Form. Late entries, paper copies and incomplete submissions will not be accepted.

JUDGING CRITERIA - Judging considers Four-Way Test correlation, choice of topic, thought organization, language usage, and grammar and spelling. Original thinking and personal reflection should be evident. The essay may focus on one, two, or all four principles; the preamble briefly connects the topic to all four questions. Students need not give each principle its own section.

AI Use, Original Work and Disqualification Policy:

Students may use AI tools for brainstorming, research assistance, organization, grammar, spelling, punctuation, clarity edits, citation formatting and logic checks. Students must independently verify background information. AI may not write the essay or substantial portions of it, generate paragraphs that are copied or lightly rewritten, replace the student's ideas or ethical reasoning, invent personal experiences, opinions or reflections, or answer the prompt in place of the student's own values and application of the Four-Way Test. Final ideas, analysis, conclusions, words and voice must be the student's original work. On the Student Information Form, identify any AI tools used and explain how they were used, including grammar or spelling assistance. Write 'None' if no AI was used. Plagiarism, undisclosed AI-generated content, or essays that do not reflect the student's own work may be disqualified, and any announced prize placement or prize money may be forfeited.