

2026 COMPETITION • OPEN TO STUDENTS WORLDWIDE

Whole Brain Science Writing Competition

Discovering Young Scientists for the World

Inspired by Northwestern University's Whole-Brain Engineering philosophy, we created this platform to spark original ideas among younger generations and make their voices heard. We believe investigative and persuasive writing provides an ideal way to unite two essential elements of whole brain thinking—scientific literacy and humanistic understanding.

14–19

STUDENT AGES

2,000 words

MAXIMUM ESSAY LENGTH

6

THEMES

18

QUESTIONS

Annual Whole Brain Scholar

Each year, we will also select one outstanding competition participant as our Annual Whole Brain Scholar and sponsor the awardee's participation in a research project with a professor or scholar at one of the world's leading universities.

REGISTRATION DEADLINE

January 15, 2027

STANDARD SUBMISSION DEADLINE

January 31, 2027

EXTENDED SUBMISSION DEADLINE

February 21, 2027**Register Now**

Our Inspiration

*The world needs more than great scientists.
It needs whole-brain thinkers.*

Whole-Brain Engineering philosophy was developed and championed by Professor Julio Mario Ottino during his tenure as dean of Northwestern University's McCormick School of Engineering. Conventional wisdom associates the right brain with qualitative thinking—creativity and intuition—and the left brain with quantitative thinking—analysis and mathematical reasoning. But solving the most challenging problems of our time requires both modes of thinking to work together.

Inspired by Professor Ottino's commitment to advancing the whole-brain philosophy, we established **Whole Brain Scholars (WBS)** as an independent educational organization to carry this vision forward. The current education system, with its strong emphasis on memorization and quantitative deduction, is woefully inadequate in preparing students for whole-brain thinking. We believe investigative and persuasive writing provides an ideal way to unite two essential elements of the whole-brain philosophy—**scientific literacy and humanistic understanding**. This belief led us to launch our first Whole Brain Science Writing Competition in 2026.

WHOLE-BRAIN ENGINEERING



Key Dates

September 18, 2026

Prompts Released

November 15, 2026

Registration Opens

December 15, 2026

Submissions Open

January 15, 2027

Registration Deadline

January 31, 2027

Standard Submission Deadline

February 21, 2027

Extended Submission Deadline

March 20, 2027

Finalists Announced

April 15, 2027

Annual Whole Brain Scholar Announced

Our Honorary Board



Professor Julio M. Ottino

Former Dean, McCormick School of Engineering
Professor of Chemical and Biological Engineering
Professor of Kellogg School of Management

Northwestern University

Professor Julio M. Ottino is a renowned engineering scientist, educator, and artist. He has authored over 260 peer-reviewed journal articles and three books, with **over 27,000 citations**. His seminal book, *The Kinematics of Mixing*, alone has been cited more than 3,500 times. His contributions have earned him election to three of America's most distinguished peer-elected academies: the National Academy of Sciences, National Academy of Engineering, and American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He also received the Bernard M. Gordon Prize, **the highest U.S. honor in engineering education**, for developing and implementing the Whole-Brain Engineering philosophy.



Professor Richard M. Lueptow

Senior Associate Dean, McCormick School of Engineering
Professor of Mechanical Engineering

Northwestern University

After earning his PhD in Mechanical Engineering from MIT, Professor Lueptow joined Northwestern University, where he has built a distinguished academic career spanning nearly four decades. His research ranges from fundamental flow physics to water purification, resulting in **nearly 200 peer-reviewed journal publications and six patents**. He has been elected a Fellow of the American Physical Society, the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, and the American Institute of Chemical Engineers, and has received numerous honors for excellence in both research and teaching.

The student must remain the thinker

We do not want AI to replace critical thinking or whole-brain thinking. Instead, we want the younger generation to use AI as a tool that supports inquiry, expands creativity, and accelerates learning, while curiosity, judgment, and original reasoning remain their own.

Why this competition matters

Bringing Whole Brain Thinking to Younger Generations

More Diverse

While many writing programs and competitions focus primarily on the humanities and social sciences, Whole Brain Scholars embraces a much broader range of disciplines—from the natural sciences, engineering, and mathematics to economics, psychology, philosophy, history, and beyond. **We believe that students in every field can benefit from developing critical thinking skills through writing.** Learning to question assumptions, evaluate evidence, construct arguments, and communicate complex ideas with clarity benefits students throughout their academic journey, regardless of their academic interests.

More Transparent

We are committed to a transparent judging process, with expectations clearly communicated and evaluation criteria consistently applied. Participating in a writing competition requires a significant investment of time, thought, and intellectual effort. We want to assure our students that their work will receive a fair and thorough evaluation. By **making assessment less of a “black box”**, we aim to help students understand not only how their work is judged, but also what rigorous and thoughtful writing looks like.

More Accessible

We believe that high-quality writing and research resources should be accessible to all young people, regardless of their background or access to academic networks. We are committed to sharing **free, high-quality writing resources** as the program grows. Each year, we will also select one outstanding competition participant as our **Annual Whole Brain Scholar** and sponsor the awardee's participation in a research project with a professor or scholar at one of the world's leading universities. Through this initiative, we hope to open doors to opportunities that might otherwise be out of reach and give them the opportunity to experience research beyond the classroom.

Our Judges

Our judging panel includes professors and scholars from **Northwestern University, Harvard University, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), University of Oxford, University of Cambridge** and other leading universities, together with subject-matter experts from different industries around the world.

Working collaboratively, our judges evaluate each submission with academic rigor and an appreciation for original thinking. We look for students who ask meaningful questions, examine evidence critically, connect ideas across disciplines, and communicate their thinking clearly.



Choose One of Eighteen Prompts

THEME A

Technology That Has to Earn Our Trust

- 01 Which AI Risk Should We Fix First?
- 02 How Can You Turn Your Phone into a Hidden Camera Detector?
- 03 What Happens When Quantum Computing Meets Today's Encryption?

THEME B

Mind, Brain, and Machines

- 04 Can We Put the Mind on a Number Scale?
- 05 Can Trauma Be Biologically Passed Down Across Generations?
- 06 Do Large Language Models Think, or Are They Just Very Good at Looking Like They Do?

THEME C

Medicine Beyond Promising Ideas

- 07 What Is Holding Cancer Vaccines Back?
- 08 Do Popular Home Remedies Really Change Your Appearance?
- 09 Can Gut Bacteria Change the Course of Alzheimer's Disease?

THEME D

Big Ideas Meet Real Science

- 10 Can an AI Data Center Work in Space?
- 11 How Can We Mine Old Electronics Without Making a New Mess?
- 12 How Can Athletes Use Math to Enhance Their Performance?

THEME E

Economic Systems Under Pressure

- 13 What Happens If the World Needs Fewer Dollars?
- 14 Can We Measure What Happens When Noncompetes Are Restricted?
- 15 How Much Debt Can an Emerging Market Carry?

THEME F

History and Philosophy of Real Science

- 16 Which Technology Has Contributed Most to Women's Freedom?
- 17 Can Scientific Research Be Value-Free? And Should Science Try to Be Value-Free?
- 18 Is It More Important for a Scientific Model to Be True or to Be Useful?

[Register Now](#)