



Literary Criticism Handbook

For Contest Directors, Coaches and Contestants

2024 • 2025

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University Interscholastic League

Literary Criticism Handbook

The details in this handbook expand upon the information in the UIL Constitution & Contest Rules. In addition to this handbook, coaches, contestants and contest directors should read Sections 900-906 for information pertaining to all contests. See also the Academic Quick Reference Chart found at the end of this handbook and on the UIL website.

From the UIL Constitution & Contest Rules:

Section 940: HIGH SCHOOL LITERARY CRITICISM CONTEST

- (a) THE CONTEST.
 - (1) Purpose. The Literary Criticism Contest challenges students to acquire a thorough knowledge of literary history and of critical terms, and encourages development of abilities through critically thinking about literary texts.
 - (2) Format. The contest will consist of objective questions and an essay assessing knowledge of literary history and of critical terms, and ability in literary criticism. Students are tested over material on the reading list announced annually on the UIL website and shall also analyze literary passages from works not on the reading list.
 - (3) Essay. Contestants who fail to submit an essay shall be disqualified. The essay will be evaluated only for contestants with tied objective portion scores in order to break the ties for students ranking through sixth place. Although the essay section is required of all contestants, no points will be awarded.
- (b) ENTRIES.
 - (1) Individual Competition. Each member high school may enter as many as six individuals in the district meet, which may be limited to a maximum of four individuals with district executive committee approval.
 - (2) Team Competition. A school shall have a minimum of three contestants compete in order to participate in the team competition. All four members of the winning team will advance to the next higher level of competition.
- (c) QUALIFICATION. Individuals, teams and wild cards qualify for the next level of competition according to Section 902.
- (d) TIES.
 - (1) Individual Competition. All ties shall be broken through sixth place. If two or more contestants are tied, three judges who are not coaches of the tied contestants will rank the essays and give the higher rank to the contestant with the better essay based on judging criteria in the contest handbook. The objective score is not adjusted to reflect the breaking of a tie; the ranking itself suffices to indicate the breaking of a tie.
 - (2) Team Competition. Refer to Section 902 (h)(3)(D).

Literary Criticism

Contest Rules and Procedures

1. **CONTEST ROSTER.** A contest roster listing contestants will be created from schools' online entries and provided by the contest director.
2. **NUMBERING CONTESTANTS.** Each contestant has been assigned a number. This contestant's number is on the contest roster and should be placed, by the contestant during roll call, on the contestant's test, answer sheet and essay pages. See Organizing Materials, page 6 for helpful detail.
3. **ROLL CALL.** The contest director will call roll from the contest roster and replace any contestant who is not present with a certified substitute at district and the certified alternate or team substitute at regional and state. All persons except participating contestants, the contest director, assistants and monitors will be excluded from the room.
4. **SUBSTITUTIONS AND ALTERNATES.** Schools may replace individual contestants on the official district meet roster with a substitute as long as the substitute presents the contest director with the appropriate documentation. Alternates may compete at region and state only in the absence of an individual who won first, second or third place in the preceding competition. If a member of a school's team cannot compete at region or state, only one substitution may be made. See the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules Section 903-905 for clarification.
5. **SEATING.** Contestants will be seated sparsely around the room and away from other contestants from the same school.
6. **LATE ARRIVAL.** Except in emergencies, the UIL does not recommend allowing contestants to enter the room after this contest has begun. The decision to allow late entry rests with the contest director.
7. **MATERIALS.** Contestants shall furnish their own pens or pencils. Contest directors shall provide contestants with a test, answer sheet and blank (preferably lined) paper for the essay. Contestants may write on the exam. Textbooks, periodicals and other resources cannot be accessed by contestants during the contest.
8. **SOURCES USED FOR COMPOSING TESTS.** William Harmon's *A Handbook to Literature* (check current reading list for the edition being used), state-adopted texts and the announced reading list for the current year, posted on the UIL website, will be used as sources for the tests.
9. **TEST DISTRIBUTION.** Testing materials will be distributed and contestants shall not open the test prior to instructions from the contest director. The assigned contestant number should be written in the top right-hand corner of the test, answer sheet and each page of the essay.
10. **ESSAY REQUIRED.** A tiebreaker is required in which the contestant shall write a good-form essay dealing with a specified topic about a short literary passage. Contestants who fail to write an essay shall be disqualified.
11. **ANNOUNCEMENTS.** Following roll call and prior to the start of the test, contest directors shall read aloud to the contestants the section of this handbook titled Announcements Prior to Conducting the Contest.

12. **START AND STOP SIGNALS.** Contest directors will give the signal to start. After exactly 90 minutes, the contest director will give the oral notification to stop. The contest director should give an oral notification when 15 minutes of contest time remain; however, responsibility for keeping up with time rests with contestants.
13. **TIMING AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES.** Contestants may use timing devices as long as they do not emit audible signals during the contest. Cell phones, smart watches or any device that can wirelessly connect to the internet, electronic tablets, music players, headphones, etc. may not be used in the testing room. These and all other electronic devices not allowed in the contest should be turned off and should not be accessible during testing.
14. **ANSWER SHEETS.** Answers should be written as capital letters on the answer sheet. Graders will not consider answers written on the test itself. The essay shall be completed on the three pages of (preferably lined) paper provided by the contest director.
15. **LEGIBILITY.** Capital letters should be used on the answer sheet. If a consensus of graders cannot read an answer, that answer will be marked incorrect.
16. **TURNING IN PAPERS.** Contestants may turn in papers and exit the contest room as soon as they complete the test and the essay.
17. **GRADERS.** Coaches are expected to serve as graders and should be selected by the contest director prior to the beginning of the contest. One grader will be designated as the lead grader.
18. **ANSWER KEY.** Prior to the start of grading, the lead grader should communicate to the contest director any of the reviewers' concerns and any suggested changes to the answer key as soon as possible.
19. **ANSWER KEY ERRORS.** In the case of a suspected error on the answer key, the contest director should contact the UIL State Office and/or contact the state contest director as soon as possible to communicate the suspected error and to seek clarification before changing the key. Any key error confirmed by the UIL State Office or the state contest director should be corrected on the key used for grading.
20. **GRADING THE CONTEST.** Each test should be graded by more than one person and errors initialed by the grader who marked the error.
21. **SCORING.** The objective portion of all tests will be carefully scored, awarding points for each correct answer as outlined: The 30 items in Part 1 are worth one point each. The 20 items in Part 2 are worth two points each. The 15 items in Part 3 are worth two points each. In the event of a tie, three to five judges will evaluate the essays of the tied contestants. The contestant essays involved in the tie(s) will be judged one against the other(s) to break the tie(s). The essays should be compared in terms of their response to the prompt, the quality and depth of the literary analysis and the quality of written expression—in that order. No points for the essay are awarded. The decision of the judges and contest director is final. The objective score is **not** adjusted to reflect the breaking of a tie; the ranking itself suffices to indicate the breaking of a tie.
22. **PLACES AND TIES.** Contestants qualify for the next level of competition as individual first, second and third place winners or members of the winning team or wild card team, according to Section 902 of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules.
 - a. Individual Competition. First place goes to the contestant making the highest total score, second place to the contestant making the next highest, third place to the next highest and so on. Ties shall be broken according to Section 940 of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules.

- b. **Team Competition.** The sum of the top three objective scores from each school constitutes the team score for the school. First place is awarded to the team with the highest team score and second and third place to the teams with the next two highest scores. Team ties shall be broken according to Section 902 (h)(3)(D) of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules (see also page 12 of this handbook). All team members who qualify for regional or state will compete for individual honors.
 - c. **Wild Card.** A wild card team will advance according to Section 902 of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules.
23. **VERIFICATION PERIOD.** Following grading and input of unofficial results into the online entry system, contestants and coaches shall be allowed a time period to review contest materials (see After the Contest, Verification Period). Contestants and coaches not present at verification waive the opportunity to ask questions about grading and ranking only and must accept final results as official. The purpose of the verification period is to check accuracy in scoring, tabulation and data entry, not to challenge the test or answer key.
 24. **ANNOUNCING OFFICIAL RESULTS.** Following the verification period, the contest director should announce the names and schools of contestants through sixth place and the top three teams. Official results, once announced, are final.
 25. **RETURNING THE PAPERS.** When results are final, district papers may be returned but not sooner than the end of the last contest day of district week. Regional papers may not be returned sooner than late Saturday of region weekend.
 26. **NOTIFYING ALTERNATES.** If an individual qualifier cannot compete at the next higher meet, the alternate shall be notified and allowed to compete in accordance with Section 904 (Region) and Section 905 (State) of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules. If a member of a school's team is unable to compete at the next higher level of competition, only one substitution may be made. The substitute shall give the contest director a substitute eligibility form or a letter certifying eligibility, signed by a school administrator.
 27. **CONFIDENTIALITY.** Coaches, contest directors and contestants shall maintain confidentiality of contest material until the official release date. Transfer of information relative to the test shall be considered a violation of the Academic Contest Ethics Code and subject to penalties as outlined in the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules.
 28. **SWEEPSTAKES POINTS.** Points are awarded through sixth place and to first and second place teams according to Section 902 of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules. Third place team is not awarded points.

BEFORE THE CONTEST

ROOM

Secure a room of adequate size for the number of contestants expected. The room should have chairs and desks or tables of proper height. Designate a room for grading.

MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT

The contest director will provide:

- Three blank sheets (preferably lined) of paper for each contestant's essay
- Stapler
- Pens for grading
- Accurate clock for timing, placed so that the contestants can see it during the contest
- (DISTRICT) Recommended one 8.5 x 11 envelope per school entered, for returning materials
- (DISTRICT) Recommended for returning materials: one 8" x 11" env elope or binder clip per school entered

CONTEST PACKET

The League office will provide:

- Copy of the UIL Literary Criticism Handbook
- Copies of the tests and answer keys
- Answer sheets

The meet director may schedule a specific time and place for contest directors to pick up the test packet before the contest. Contest officials should inventory the contents before the contest. The packet should be checked to verify the correct materials are enclosed and the number of copies included is sufficient for the number of competitors. Check all tests to ensure that all pages are printed clearly and completely. Make certain that there are enough keys to include at least one clean copy-one for each participating school- with returned contestants' tests and answer sheets. The test packet should then be resealed and not opened again until just prior to the beginning of the contest.

PERSONNEL

Coaches of competitors may serve as contest directors, assistants and monitors.

- Contest director
- Assistant to the contest director
- Room monitor(s)
- Graders: Almost certainly the best graders will be coaches of the contestants, and UIL encourages the contest director use his or her skills and experience to ensure accurate and efficient grading of the test papers. Designate one grader as the lead grader. Make these selections prior to the beginning of the contest.
- Tiebreaker judges: Three to five judges who have no vested interest in the contest should read and rank the essays in the event of a tie. These judges may be either coaches whose contestants are not involved in the tie or other qualified teachers of literature.

TIME

Allot up to two hours for the contest: approximately 20 minutes for opening remarks, roll call, instructions and handing out materials and 90 minutes for the test. Because some contestants may need to go to other events, it is critical to stay on schedule. Arrange for and announce during the opening remarks the time and place of the verification period prior to the announcement of official results.

CONTEST ROSTER AND RESULTS SHEET

Obtain a copy of the contest roster from the meet director, that has been generated from the UIL Spring Meet Online Entry System. It will list the school, contestant number, contestant name, district or region number and will indicate the competitors and alternates. Record scores and/or results on this form to give to the meet director, who will then enter the results/scores into the online system before verification is held for the event.

ORGANIZING MATERIALS

Check all tests to ensure that all pages are printed clearly and completely. Each contestant will be assigned a number indicated on the contest roster. The number will be listed on the roster as, for example, 6A-17 or 2A-4, indicating the conference and a number. Ensure that the contestant writes his or her contestant number in the upper right-hand corner of the test cover sheet, on the answer sheet, and on each page of the tie-breaking essay.

If there is more than one district or conference at the meet, it is important to differentiate contestant numbers by district or conference.

SORTING ENVELOPES (DISTRICT RECOMMENDATION)

Provide (and label) one large (8.5 x 11) envelope or binder clip for each school with contestants entered in the contest, and write the name of the school on the envelope. After the verification period, contestants' tests, answer sheets and a key (one per school) should be placed in the appropriate envelope for return to each school no sooner than late Saturday of the district week. The meet director and the contest director are responsible for deciding whether testing materials can be taken by the contestants and coaches immediately after the contest's verification period is over.

CONDUCTING THE CONTEST

1. Set up the room to best facilitate the monitoring of the room by contest officials.
2. Organize contest materials for easy distribution.
3. Seat the contestants sparsely around the room, separating contestants from the same school.
4. Call roll from the roster and provide students with their assigned contestant number. Replace any contestant who is not present with a certified substitute at district and the certified substitute or alternate at regional.
5. Dismiss from the contest room all individuals, except the contestants, contest director and assistants. Instruct graders to report to the grading room with answer keys and surplus tests; remind them about confidentiality.
6. Distribute the test, answer sheet and three pieces of (preferably lined) paper for the essay. Caution contestants not to open the test until instructed.
7. Read aloud the announcements listed below.

Announcements Prior to Conducting the Contest

- a. Do not open the test until instructed to do so.
 - b. Timing devices that do not emit audible signals during the contest may be used. All cell phones, smart watches or other prohibited devices must be turned off, not set to vibrate and out of sight.
 - c. Write your assigned contestant number in the top right-hand corner on the answer sheet, the test and each page of your essay. (Check for accuracy if it has already been written by the contest officials.)
 - d. You may write on the test paper; however, answers must be written on the answer sheet, using capital letters, and the essay on the paper provided, on only one side of the paper.
 - e. All participants must respond, in good essay form, to the essay prompt.
 - f. This is a 90-minute contest. You may turn in contest materials, including all brainstorming notes and rough drafts, once you have finished the test.
 - g. Verification period will be held in room _____ at ___ a.m./p.m. This is the only time for contestants and coaches to verify grading and the unofficial results.
 - h. Are there any questions?
8. Ensure that the contestants have a quiet setting for the contest; check for hallway noise.
 9. Give contestants the signal to start. Terminate the contest at the end of exactly 90 minutes. Give an oral notification when 15 minutes of contest time remain. When the time has elapsed, the contest director should collect all test materials, including tests, answer sheets and essays, as well as notes, rough drafts, etc. Check that the correct contestant number is on each document to be judged or graded.
 10. Deliver all materials to the grading room.
 11. Submit the substitution forms/letters to the meet director before grading begins to update the original entry in the online entry system.

GRADING THE CONTEST

GRADERS

The contest director should select judges to grade tests. Coaches may serve as graders of the objective portions of the contest. At least three impartial judges will be selected to grade with rank the tiebreaking essays. Contest coaches whose students are not involved in the standings may judge the essays.

Graders should report to the grading room as soon as the contest begins. The lead grader will provide answer keys and surplus tests to the grading room when the contest has started. Persons not assigned to grade should not enter the grading room.

Graders should review the test and verify the official answer key. In the case of an error on the answer key of an objectively-scored contest, graders should notify the UIL state office of the nature of the error and/or contact the respective state contest director to seek clarification. Questions should not be altered in any way or discarded without a ruling from the UIL state office and/or the respective state contest director.

GRADING INSTRUCTIONS

Have more than one person grade each answer sheet. Graders should initial the answer sheet where indicated. Using pencils or pens of different colors is a good option.

Each grader is to be given a key to the questions. At least two graders should verify the answers on each answer sheet in accordance with the key. Use a calculator to compute and verify the score. Grade tests contending to place no fewer than three times.

When marking the answer sheets, no mark should be made if the item is correct. Place an X over the question number that is incorrect. Do not mark over the contestant's answer. If any answer space is left blank, draw a line through the blank.

Each contestant shall be awarded the points indicated for each correct answer. Do not deduct points for incorrect answers. See test instructions for varying point values. Add points carefully.

GRADING THE ESSAY

Coaches or other qualified teachers of literature may be selected by the contest director for the judging of the tiebreaking essays. If ties exist, three coaches whose contestants are not involved in the tie or other judges should be asked to read the essays, working without supervision or interference, of only the tied contestants.

Break all ties through sixth place. The essays from Part 4 must be used in breaking these ties. Only the essays of the contestants tied for a place will be read and compared. If, for example, the top six scores are 93, 92, 90, 90, 89 and 88, the first place winner (93) and the second place winner (92) are clear. Break the tie between the two contestants scoring 90 each by

judging the essays of these two contestants to determine who places third and who is the alternate, or fourth place winner. Mark the results of the tiebreaker clearly on the roster and results form.

Do not add or subtract points or half-points to rank the tests: any altering of the objective scores might well affect wild card determination.

The decision of the judges about which essay is better will determine the winner of the tie. The essay should be judged on the contestant's attention to the prompt, the quality of the literary analysis, the quality of the written expression, and the correctness of the writing—in that order. Even though the essay is required of each contestant, no points are awarded. Contestants who fail to write an essay will be disqualified.

PLACES AND TIES

Refer to Literary Criticism Contest Rules and Procedures on page 3 of this handbook.

IDENTIFYING PAPERS

After papers have been ranked, indicate on the answer sheet the name and school of the student, or simply the school that corresponds with the contestant number. This will expedite both the verification process and the sorting of contest materials for return after the meet concludes.

AFTER THE CONTEST

REPORT TO THE MEET DIRECTOR

Individual contest directors shall give the contest roster/results form to the meet director immediately after the contest papers are scored and ties are broken. The meet director is responsible for entering results into the online entry system. All scores must be entered into the online entry system prior to verification and announcement of results. Enter all contestants' scores, not just the top six. All scores are needed to determine team results. Provide at least one copy of the unofficial results from the online entry system during verification.

VERIFICATION PERIOD

Announce that no one present may use writing or erasing instruments during the verification period. Photos of the test and answer key are forbidden. If the key was changed during the grading process (with the approval of the UIL state office or the state contest director), the contest director shall announce the changes made. The contest director shall allow the contestants and coaches a time period not to exceed 15 minutes to look at all of the following items:

- Contestant's test, answer sheet and essay
- An answer key in its original form with any correction(s) authorized by and only by the League office
- Display of scores after entry into the UIL Online Entry System

Do not allow anyone to take papers from the room. During this period, the contestants and/or coaches shall verify that they have the correct papers and look for possible errors in the grading, calculation or data entry of scores. Display each contestant's score (not just the top 6 places) preferably by displaying the printed page from the online scoring system after scores were entered. This will allow data entry of scores to be reviewed by contestants and coaches during the Verification Period.

If errors in grading, scoring or online data entry are found during the verification period, the contest director shall make the corrections. After resolving all questions, or the end of the 15 minutes, the contest director should announce that the Verification Period has ended. If papers are not being returned on the day of the contest, see Returning Papers below.

At state meet only, the contest director may omit a display of data entry into the UIL Spring Meet Online Entry System if data entry has been carefully reviewed and verified by graders or other assistants during the grading and scoring period.

ANNOUNCING OFFICIAL WINNERS

After resolving all questions, or the end of the 15 minutes, the contest director should announce that verification has ended. Official results with the name and the school of each contestant who places first through sixth and the schools of the winning, second and third place teams should be announced. These results, once announced as official, shall be final.

QUALIFICATIONS TO REGIONAL OR STATE

Contestants can qualify to the next level of competition as individual first, second and third place winners or members of the winning team or wild card team as described in Section 902 (h)(3) of the UIL Constitution and Contest Rules.

RETURNING PAPERS

If papers are not being returned, pick up all tests, answer sheets, scoring charts and keys so that none remain with a contestant or coach. Place the materials in the sorting envelopes by school. At the district meet, papers may be returned no sooner than the end of the meet on the last day of the district week. If the region meet is held on Saturday, the test, answer keys, scoring charts and answer sheets may be returned to the contestants at the end of the day.

CONTEST QUICK REFERENCE CHART

Note: Grading time varies. For most events, allocate a minimum of two hours.

Contest

ROOMS

1 – testing
1 – grading
PREP TIME – 20
TEST TIME – 90

CONTEST MATERIALS

UIL Provides: Packet: tests, keys, answer sheets.

Director Provides: contest roster and results form (generated from online entry system), contest rules, clock, 8.5 x 11-inch (preferably lined) paper, pencils or pens for graders, stapler, and one 8.5 x 11-inch envelope per school

PERSONNEL

Director
One or more assistant(s)/monitor(s)
Lead grader
3-5 tie-breaker judges

NUMBER OF ENTRIES

(District) 6 per school
(Region) 1st/2nd/3rd individuals per district;
1st place team per district; wild card team.

TIES

Individual: Break ties for 1st through 6th by judging essays. **Objective scores are not altered to break ties**

Team: Break tie with fourth team member score. If tie still exists, all teams involved in tie advance. Team without a fourth member forfeits.

GRADING/JUDGES

At least 3, preferably more. Graders may be coaches; however, tiebreaker judges should not participate in breaking ties involving their own contestants.

AWARDS

Individual medals: 1st through 6th
Team medals: 1st and 2nd place teams
Plaque: 1st place team (2nd and 3rd place at Region and State)

POINTS

1 st – 15	4 th – 8
2 nd – 12	5 th – 6
3 rd – 10	6 th – 4

1st team – 10
2nd team – 5

ADVANCE: Top 3 individuals and 1st place team.
One wild card team per regional will also advance.

Study Material

Visit the UIL Study Materials webpage (<https://www.uiltexas.org/academics/resources/study-materials>) to purchase or download study materials. Some materials are available for free download.

- Literary Criticism Study Packets include the prior year's tests as samples and the current reading list.
- The UIL Literary Criticism homepage features a link to a pdf study aid that serves as a non-exhaustive master list of terms used in previous years' contests.

The Academics homepage of the UIL website contains a variety of additional forms needed for academic programs, including the Professional Acknowledgment Form for all sponsors, coaches and directors of academic events and the Substitute Eligibility Form needed for contestants not listed on the original entry form for UIL meets.

The Literary Criticism Handbook includes a description of the current UIL contest format, rules and procedures. It is available as a free download: <http://www.uiltexas.org/academics/resources/contest-handbooks-manuals>

The generic forms needed to host invitational meets, such as grading rubrics, answer sheets and contest results form are posted, as are the Academic Meet Director Manual, the conflict pattern and various checklists for Academic Coordinators. Check the different web pages for speech and debate, theatre, and the A+ Program for current information and forms specific to those contests.



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Phone: 512.471.5883 • Academic Email: academics@uiltexas.org