

HOW TO TACKLE THE UIL ESSAY CONTESTS

GAIL HERMAN, SULPHUR SPRINGS HIGH SCHOOL

STUDENT ACTIVITIES CONFERENCE, TJC, FALL 2022



BEFORE WE GET STARTED

Remember to register your attendance and
complete session evaluations.

Session numbers are in your program.



Attendance



Online Handouts



Session Evaluations

TWO CONTESTS

- **Barbara Jordan Historical Essay Competition** (established in 1995 as an event sponsored by The University of Texas at Austin, moved to its new home with UIL Academics in 2011-2012)
- **Latino History Essay Contest** (established in 2011 by the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement at UT-Austin, moved to UIL Academics in 2012-2013)

SIMILAR REQUIREMENTS FOR BOTH CONTESTS

- Focus on historically underrepresented groups
- Describe positive contributions to the history or culture of Texas
- Focus on a **far-reaching** subject
- Be 1,500 to 2,500 words in length
- Be research-based
- Follow MLA or APA style and include a bibliography

BARBARA JORDAN HISTORICAL ESSAY COMPETITION

Essays should

- Address the theme of “African Americans in Texas: Past and Present.”
- Focus on an individual OR a group who is NOT well known but who has made a significant positive contribution to African American history or culture in Texas.

BARBARA JORDAN COMPETITION

Essays should add material to the historical record of African Americans in Texas. This could mean focusing on an individual who is not well-known outside your own community but who made important contributions in culture, in education, in politics, etc. Those contributions might have affected primarily your community, or they might have also had a broader impact on the state. You might also focus on a person who played an important but not necessarily widely known role in a larger event or movement.

BARBARA JORDAN COMPETITION

An essay will not be disqualified if it focuses on a person who is arguably well-known **to some**; however, some subjects typically are written on several times each year, so if you can find a lesser-known subject who has had an impact, your essay might stand out from others.

LATINO HISTORY ESSAY

Essays should

- Address the theme of Historical and Cultural Legacies of Latinos in Texas History.
- Focus on a prominent OR relatively unknown Latino individual, organization, OR movement in Texas history.
- Demonstrate how the subject positively and significantly influenced today's Latino communities. An essay based on original research should add material to the historical record of Latinos in Texas.

SIDE BY SIDE COMPARISON

- **Barbara Jordan Contest:** Focus on an African American individual OR group who is NOT well known
- **Latino Contest :** Focus on a prominent OR relatively unknown Latino individual, organization, OR movement in Texas history
- The subject's contribution must be **positive and significant.**

SO HOW DO I GET
STARTED?
TAKE ONE STEP AT A
TIME!



STEP ONE: FINDING A FAR-REACHING SUBJECT

Look first to your own community. Talk to parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends, teachers, librarians, genealogists, members of the clergy, community leaders, local government officials, etc., in search of ideas. You might also come across a good topic by reading the newspaper or searching the Internet.



EVALUATE POTENTIAL SUBJECTS CAREFULLY

Determine what a potential subject's influence has been. Again, the contributions of your subject must be **positive and far-reaching**. Their contributions must extend outside of your immediate family and friends. Your subject may have affected them, but he or she should also have affected your community or even the state. The subject's influence must have reached **beyond a small group of people**.

STEP TWO: RESEARCH

Once you have identified a potential subject, do some research. Test your theory that your subject will be an effective topic.

RESEARCH TIPS

- Make notes about the subject's accomplishments.
- Look for a variety of sources.
- If your subject is living, look for contact information and see if you can schedule an interview (telephone, email, or in person).
- What about those whom your subject positively affected? Make a list of potential interviewees and look for contact information. Note their current positions as well as their connection with your subject.

BE REALISTIC

If your preliminary research doesn't seem to suggest that the subject will be effective or if you just cannot find enough about the subject's accomplishments or if the subject was a one-hit wonder and there's just not enough to write about, then face the fact that it might be time to look further for a subject.

RESEARCH STRATEGIES

Find a way to stay organized:

- Bookmark potential Internet sources.
- Organize relevant materials into folders on your computer.
- Save important computer files in more than one place!
- For physical notes and sources, try using a folder or binder.

MORE RESEARCH TIPS

Do not base your essay entirely on Internet sources. Recognize that valid historical research can rarely be done using only the Internet. Again, first-person interviews, either with the subject of your essay or with those your subject has influenced, can add a great deal to an essay.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Look for sources that are not readily available on the Internet. These might include **primary sources**, which provide first-hand information. Examples are journals, diaries, speeches, letters, interviews, family papers, historical records, eyewitness accounts, original scholarly research, and creative works such as writing, video, or photography. You are encouraged to include primary sources.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources can be helpful in supplying material that provides context and background. Such sources include

- books,
- encyclopedias,
- articles in periodicals (newspapers, magazines, scholarly articles)
- websites

(Newspaper archives can be useful.)



ALL SOURCES ARE NOT CREATED EQUAL

- Information obtained from a personal website can be unreliable. Such information must be corroborated with a more reliable source.
- Websites such as Wikipedia are not considered scholarly sources. Resist the temptation to use whatever pops up first during an Internet search. Try to find something more specific than, say, history.com. Generally, sites associated with universities, government entities, or other reputable organizations are better choices.

DOCUMENT SOURCES ACCURATELY

- As you conduct your research, keep up with where all your information came from. Your essay must include appropriate documentation of sources (MLA or APA format recommended). Entries that do not include source citations and a complete bibliography will **not** be accepted.
- An **annotated** bibliography is **not** required, but if you have a source that needs some explaining, you might consider an annotation.

STEP THREE: YOU HAVE A LOT OF INFORMATION NOW—WHAT DO YOU DO WITH IT?

- Go through all the information you have collected to see if there are any gaps: is there anything you need to know about that you have failed to find out? Conduct more research if necessary.
- Once you think you have all the information together, then it is time to think about how to organize it all. You will probably include some basic background information about your subject early in the essay, so organize that part of your material first.

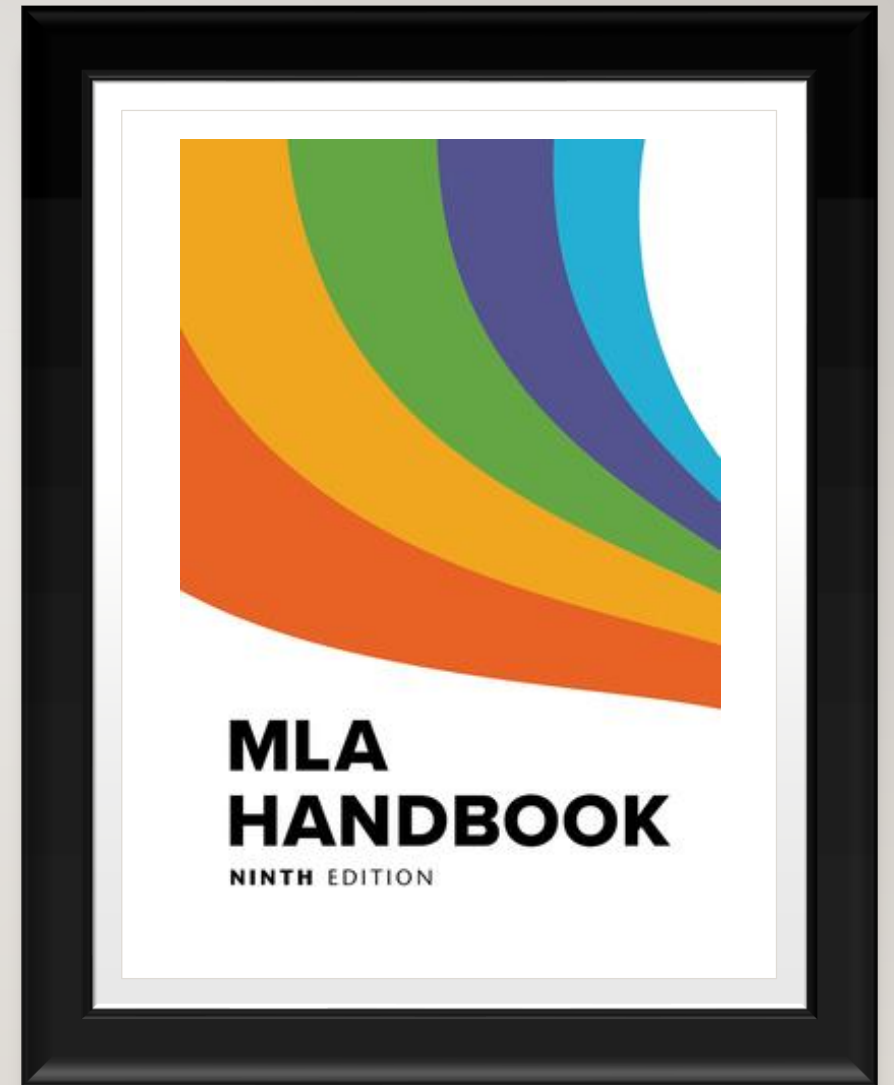
CONTINUE TO ORGANIZE

- Next you will organize your subject's accomplishments. Usually, the clearest and most logical way to do so is chronologically. In discussing the subject's accomplishments, **always keep in mind that you need to demonstrate how the subject had a positive and far-reaching effect on the history or culture of Texas.** Your essay should **not** be merely a list; it should instead bring to life the subject and his/her/their accomplishments. You might try to show the connections between an individual's varying achievements.

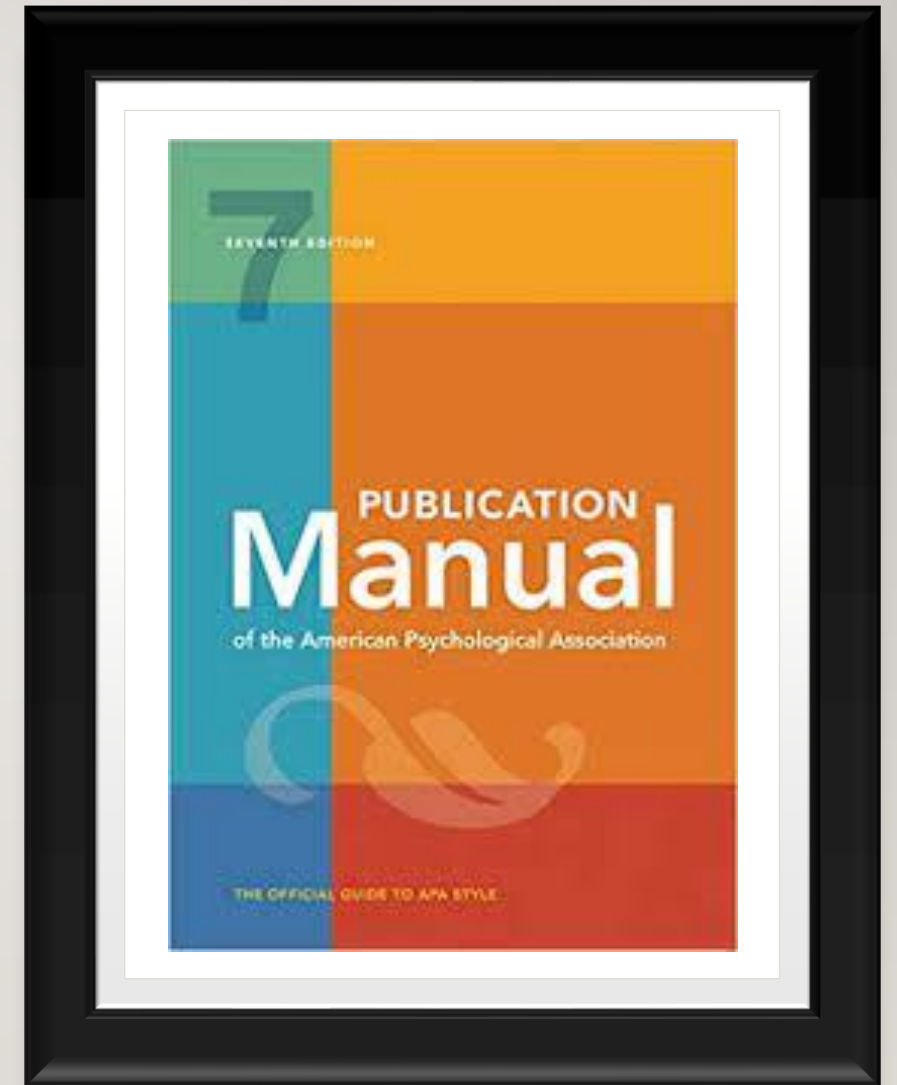
STEP FOUR: CITING SOURCES

- Decide whether you are going to follow MLA or APA style guidelines. Your school or public library or your English teacher may have a copy of these style manuals. (They are also readily available from Amazon.)
Carefully and accurately follow the guidelines for the format you select.

MLA HANDBOOK, 9TH ED. (2021)



**PUBLICATION MANUAL OF
THE AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION, 7TH ED. (2019)**



WEBSITES TO HELP WITH FORMATTING ESSAYS

- MLA:

<https://style.mla.org/>

- APA:

<https://apastyle.apa.org/>

- Both:

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/purdue_owl.html

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND INTERNAL CITATIONS

- Once you have compiled your bibliography, edit it **carefully**.
- Read through your draft and note where internal citations of sources should go.
- Again, follow the style manual that you have chosen.

OTHER FORMATTING CONSIDERATIONS:APA

APA guidelines call for a cover sheet and an abstract. For these contests, you do not need either of these. As with MLA, center your title at the top of the first page of your text and number your pages in the upper right-hand corner of each page.

OTHER FORMATTING CONSIDERATIONS: MLA

MLA guidelines call for a heading on the first page and for the author's last name to appear in a header in the upper right-hand corner of each page. Since your name is not to appear on your entry, omit the heading and your last name from your headers. Simply number your pages in the upper right-hand corner and center your title at the top of the first page of your text.

FORMATTING

- Apart from the above considerations, follow the stipulated guidelines for the format you have chosen.
- You can find sample papers for MLA format on the MLA website and examples of both formats on the Purdue OWL website.

STEP FIVE: EDIT YOUR DRAFT

- Let your writing get “cold.” In this way, you will be better able to view it objectively.
- Read your paper silently, editing as you go.
- Next, read your paper **out loud**. Frequently, you will be able to “hear” problems that need to be addressed—things such as awkward repetitions or unclear wording.
- Be sure you have used transitions appropriately throughout your essay.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- While research calls for a formal style of writing, your essay need not—indeed, should not—be dry and boring. Write with **voice** to try to make your readers feel as if they **know** your subject.
- Choose effective diction and vary your sentence structure.

ALSO ...

- Incorporate quotations skillfully.
- Provide appropriate background about your subject.
- Begin your essay with an interesting introduction that pulls readers into your essay and makes them want to continue reading. It should include **a clear thesis statement**.
- Double-check your documentation and bibliography.

FINALLY ...

Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!

BEST ADVICE:

Start early.

It takes time to select a topic, conduct research, set up interviews, organize your materials and ideas, and then write and edit your paper.

COMPETITION STRUCTURE

- Essays are first evaluated to see if they meet the basic criteria (e.g., topic, length, research, documentation).
- Judges then evaluate the entries that meet these criteria and provide comments that will be returned to contestants.
- Judges nominate essays to be considered as Finalists.
- A selection committee determines Finalists from among the nominees.
- Essays from all six UIL classifications (1A through 6A) are judged together.

AWARDS CEREMONY

- Finalists (12 in each Essay Contest) are invited to the State Meet, held in May at UT-Austin. All 24 Finalists are recognized at an awards ceremony and are presented framed certificates. They are also invited to read excerpts from their essays at the ceremony.

AWARDS CEREMONY

- After all Finalists have been recognized, those contestants placing 1st through 6th in each Contest are awarded medals.
- The top six winners in each Contest earn points toward the overall academic state championship (1st-10, 2nd-8, 3rd-6, 4th-4, 5th-2, 6th-1).

FINALISTS MAY APPLY FOR TILF SCHOLARSHIPS NEAR THE END OF THEIR SENIOR YEAR

All Finalists (12 in each Essay Contest) become eligible to apply for Texas Interscholastic League Foundation Scholarships. (TILF Scholarships may be used at Texas colleges and universities. TILF awards over a million dollars in scholarships annually.)

WINNING ESSAYS ARE ARCHIVED AT UT-AUSTIN

- The essays of Finalists in the Barbara Jordan Competition will be archived at the Briscoe Center for American History.
- The essays of Finalists in the Latino Contest will be archived as part of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas Libraries.
- Following the awards ceremony, Finalists are invited to tour the facilities where their essays will be archived.

OTHER IMPORTANT FACTS

- Deadline for entries: February 15, 2023.
- Entries are to be submitted electronically. It is best to submit your essay as a PDF. You can find the entry instructions on the UIL Essay Contest home page at uiltexas.org. Do not put your name or your school name on your paper. It will be tied to your identity through your electronic submission.

INTRO FROM ANNMARIE GUNN'S SECOND-PLACE LATINO ESSAY, 2018-19

Ruben Rodriguez: Sharing the Simple Joy of Writing

The American Transcendentalist, Henry David Thoreau, wrote: “We cannot write well or truly but what we write with gusto. The body, the senses, must conspire with the mind. Expression is the act of the whole man, that our speech may be vascular” (qtd. in Miller). Whether it is produced by the scratch of a pencil on a pad of paper or the clicking of computer keys, whole-hearted writing, such as that which Thoreau describes, is the kind valued by Ruben Rodriguez, state contest director for UIL Ready Writing, educator, AP English Language consultant, advocate of writing for the simple joy of writing, and particular fan of Thoreau. Just as Thoreau was called to observe nature at Walden Pond, Ruben Rodriguez has found his calling in education, demonstrating to students and other educators through the unifying qualities of language that human beings are much more alike than different.



INTRO FROM HARLEY ARCHER'S FIRST-PLACE LATINO ESSAY, 2020-21

One moldy piece of bread. One child. One peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

It was a typical hot summer day in 1990. Beatriz Salazar, a disabled single mother of five who lived in a low-income apartment complex in Carrollton, was taking out her trash when she saw a small boy rummaging for food and clutching a piece of moldy bread in his chubby hand. As he lifted the bread to his mouth, Beatriz cried, "No!" As he began to cry, Bea took him by the hand and led him to her apartment, where she fixed him a peanut butter and jelly sandwich that he immediately devoured. Days later, more children showed up at her apartment in hopes that she would be able to make them sandwiches as well. Weeks passed and Bea began not only to supply sandwiches to the unwatched children in her apartment complex but also to tutor them and to make other snacks for them. "*Quiero ayudar a estos chicos y chicas,*" Beatriz told her youngest daughter, Bel. "I have to help these boys and girls."



INTRO CONTINUED

From that first peanut butter and jelly sandwich came many more. Feeding hungry children turned into mentoring the next generation. From that humble beginning emerged the nonprofit known today as Bea's Kids. Thirty-one years after Bea spotted the boy digging in the trash for food, her reach has grown from twelve children to thousands. Since then, Salazar has been recognized at both the state and national levels for her work with Bea's Kids. At least two alternative schools in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch ISD have been named after her, in honor of her hard work and dedication to the children of the area. Her determination to aid and encourage children, no matter their background, is inspiring. Bea's Kids Learning Centers are located in the Carrollton-Farmers Branch area, where they offer student tutoring, teen counseling, parenting classes, school supplies, shoes, uniforms, and exposure to art, sports, and life skills ("Bea's Kids Centers").

JUDGES' EVALUATION FORM

The judges' evaluation form is available on the UIL website (<https://www.uiltexas.org/>). This document provides a concise view of important criteria for evaluation.

QUALITIES JUDGES LOOK FOR:

- Paper effectively addresses the essay prompt
- Thesis statement is effectively proven about far-reaching topic
- Purposefully utilizes a variety of sources including primary sources
- Paper is clear, well organized, and coherent

QUALITIES JUDGES LOOK FOR (CONT.):

- Concrete details (quotes, paraphrases, summaries) are effectively incorporated
- Commentary bolsters key ideas
- Paper moves beyond a summary of the subject's life
- Contains very few grammatical mistakes
- Parenthetical citations and Works Cited are mostly correct

WEAKNESSES TO AVOID:

- Thesis statement is unclear and/or weak and/or not proven and/or topic is not far-reaching
- Paper does not move beyond a biography
- Paper needs more source variety
- Lack of clarity, organization, and/or coherency

WEAKNESSES TO AVOID (CONT.):

- Concrete details are ineffective
- Commentary about research is lacking
- Multiple errors exist that hinder understanding
- Awkward sentences and/or word choice
- Parenthetical citations and/or Works Cited page is inaccurate or missing

ADVANTAGES OF COMPETING

- Learning the story and contributions of your subject
- Preserving an important part of Texas history and recognizing those who have contributed to it
- Improving research skills
- Improving thinking, organizational, and writing skills

ADVANTAGES OF COMPETING

- Developing interpersonal and interview skills
- Building self-confidence
- Possibly earning the right to compete for TILF Scholarships and having your work archived at UT-Austin.
- Possibly earning points for your school toward the State Academic Championship

CONTEST DIRECTOR

- Lisa Parker—email her with any questions.
- lparker@quiltexas.org

GOOD LUCK!

Enjoy the opportunity to learn about contributions to Texas history or culture and to share your knowledge with others!