



COSMIC COLLABORATION

***WORKING TOGETHER TO
CREATE OUR PLACE IN SPACE***

MAY 21, 2026

OPEN ESSAY COMPETITION

Submitted responses must address the theme:

COSMIC COLLABORATION

Working Together to Create Our Place in Space

- Winners will receive an invitation to participate in the 49th Herndon Science Fair Competition.
- You must **register ASAP**, but no later than **April 30, 2026** to be considered.



SCAN FOR MORE INFO

We look forward to reading your responses!



March 5, 2026

Dear Student/Parent/Faculty Member:

We're excited to invite you to participate in The Aerospace Corporation's **49th Annual Robert H. Herndon Memorial Science Competition** on Thursday, **May 21, 2026**. This event is an opportunity for middle school and high school students to showcase their innovation and explore their curiosity through writing. This year, our theme for the event is **Cosmic Collaboration: Working together to Create our Place in Space**.

The Alabama section of the event will have competitions for written essays submitted by students, which will be judged by a panel of scientists and engineers. Winners will be selected based on originality and a demonstrated understanding of the subject matter. In keeping with the long-range goal of this competition, which is to increase participation in engineering and science professions, this competition is open to students who show an interest in science or math. All entries will be evaluated by the science competition's steering committee.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the essay registration form by April 15th, 2026. Essays are to be written individually and must address the theme **Cosmic Collaboration: Working together to Create our Place in Space**. Each school may submit up to 6 essays. Online registration is required for participation.

Please complete the essay participants' registration and abstract forms by **April 15th, 2026**. You must submit your final essay by **May 2nd, 2026**. Winners will be notified on **May 21st, 2026**.

We look forward to your participation and can't wait to read the creative essays that submit to the science fair!

If you have any questions, please email us at: James.Northern@aero.org and Benjamin.Hayes@aero.org or herndonscience@aero.org.

Sincerely,

Jay Northern
Chairperson

Ben Hayes
Co-Chair

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ESSAY COMPETITORS

Robert H. Herndon Memorial Science Competition

The essay competition is open to middle and high school students. The Essay Evaluation Committee of the Robert H. Herndon Memorial Science Competition will judge all essays. Winning students will receive prizes, and awards will be given based on the merit of the essay submitted.

To participate in the essay competition, please complete the following steps:

Write an essay exploring the theme **Cosmic Collaboration: Working together to Create our Place in Space**. Topics can include any scientific discipline(s) of your choice such as biology, physics, astronomy, engineering, etc.

1. Submit the following documents by April 15, 2026:

- a. Attendee Info:
 - i. Please list participant name and Faculty/Parent contact
 - ii. Please type information into online form
- b. Essay Abstract containing:
 - i. Essay Title
 - ii. 100–150 word paragraph describing the topic
 - iii. Author's name
 - iv. Author's grade level
- c. Media Release Form:
 - i. All students must provide an individual media release.
 - ii. Download form and return via email to herndonscience@aero.org
 - iii. The media release form can be found on the Herndon Science Competition website.

2. Submit FINAL online, original 500-word (minimum) essay May 2nd , 2026

- a. All essays will be checked for plagiarism prior to judging. Essays found to be plagiarized will be disqualified and the author may not attend the competition.
- b. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is limited. AI may be used as a resource (i.e., brainstorming, summarizing, or improving grammar and syntax), but must be cited and given proper acknowledgements. Essays should be a true reflection of the student's original ideas, individual understanding, and critical thinking. The use of Generative AI is strictly forbidden.
- c. Essays must follow the proper research-paper format, including title page and bibliography or list of references.
- d. There is a 4-page length limit for Middle School and 5-page limit for High School.
 - i. Title page and bibliography do not count towards length limit.
 - ii. Font should be at least 12-point size and single spaced.
- e. Student's name should only be on the title page.
- f. Essays must be submitted electronically as a Microsoft Word document file e-mail attachment to herndonscience@aero.org. PDF submissions will not be accepted.

3. Essay winners will be notified on May 21, 2026.

If you have any questions, please contact: herndonscience@aero.org.

SAMPLE ESSAY FORMAT

The essay should follow the format shown below. In addition, attempt to address the questions listed within each section.

Section 1: Title Page

- Provide the Student Name and School
- Provide the Essay Title

Section 2: Abstract (see example previous page)

- Provide a clear statement of the topic being considered
- Provide a short summary of essay contents and any conclusion you have drawn

Section 3: Introduction/Background

- Describe the topic or technology
- Discuss the history and evolution of the topic/technology
- Discuss the development of alternative technologies

Section 4: Main Body (this may contain several subsections)

- Provide a detailed description of topic/technology
- Discuss key current technical directions and challenges
- Discuss applications of the technology (present and future)
- Compare with alternative technologies. Describe the relative advantages/disadvantages
- Provide an example of how/why this technology is beneficial
- Describe future directions of the technology
- Provide a discussion of the business opportunities: what are the most important enabling technologies, more cost-effective alternative enabling technologies.
- Identify the major vendors selling the technology
- Identify the major customers buying the technology
- Identify the important scientists/engineers/companies that have developed the technology
- Describe how this technology impacts society/people (both positives and negatives)

Section 5: Summary/Conclusion

- Summarize future of the topic/technology
- Include your opinion for possible new/unforeseen applications, problems, or limitations.

Section 6: Bibliography

- List all reference sources used in the essay and use in-text citations for the sources
- *****Plagiarism is Illegal***** Do not copy information directly from a source without referencing the sources appropriately using in-text citations and bibliography entries.
- Example In-Text Citation (e.g., MLA Style: <https://style.mla.org/in-text-citations-overview/>)
 - Human beings have been described as “symbol-using animals” (Burke, 2). (Author’s Name, Page Number)
- Example Bibliography Entry
 - Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

JUDGE'S WORKSHEET FOR ESSAY COMPETITION

(Note: This is just a guide. Record your final scores in the Essay scoring spreadsheet)

	Min					Max	Score
INITIAL PLANNING							
1. Did the student do adequate research on the chosen topic?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
2. Has the approach in the essay been well thought out and organized?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
3. Was the topic appropriate for the essay competition?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____

LEVEL OF EFFORT, ORGANIZATION, AND INITIATIVE

4. Has reasonable technical depth been demonstrated for the grade level?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
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QUALITY OF ANALYTICAL WORK

5. Has a reasonable hypothesis or analytical model been developed?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
6. Is there evidence of creative thinking in the development of the method used?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
7. Are the results or conclusions displayed in an easily understood manner?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____

PRESENTATION

8. Do the results or conclusion relate back to the hypothesis?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
9. Were the conclusions supported by the argument given?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
10. Was the report clear, easy to follow and grammatically well-written?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____
11. Was the student's understanding of the work clearly evident?	0	1	2	3	4	5	_____

Total Score _____

12. Do you suspect the use of generative AI? Yes / No