



2025 -2026 Utah's "Do the Write Thing" Challenge INSTRUCTIONS FOR CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Introduction

Thank you for involving your 7th and 8th grade students in the 2026 Utah **Do the Write Thing (DtWT) Challenge**. Across America, students are rising to the challenge of doing something to end youth violence. The **Challenge** offers middle school students the opportunity to examine the impact of youth violence on their lives, and to communicate in writing what they think should be done to change the culture of violence.

The **Challenge** emphasizes personal responsibility by encouraging students to make personal commitments to do something about the problems related to youth violence. The program ultimately seeks to give students the opportunity to break the cycle of violence in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Your involvement and support are crucial to the success of the **Challenge** in Utah.

Carefully review the following materials concerning program rules, entry deadlines, judging criteria, classroom discussion, and student recognition before presenting the program to your students—and to **be sure your students' writings will not be disqualified.**

Program Rules

- Students may use any form of written expression (e.g., essays, poems, plays, or songs), as long as the language is positive and not derogatory. Students may submit only one entry per year. All entries must be the work/product of only one student.
- Student entries, at minimum, **must address these three questions:**
 - **How has youth violence affected my life?**
 - **What are the causes of youth violence?**
 - **What can I do to reduce youth violence?**

NOTE: Writings that do not address these questions will not be advanced in the selection process.

- Entries must be in English.
- Proper citation is required if the student uses a quote or another person's materials in his or her entry. **Writings based upon plagiarism will not be advanced in the selection process.**
- Editing of content, grammar or spelling by someone other than the student is not permitted. Only original student entries are eligible to be submitted by the teacher. Grammar and spelling are not considered in the scoring matrix.
- If a story is fictional, it must be identified as such to be advanced in the selection process; however, strong preference will be given to non-fiction in the final selection process.
- Please fill out the teacher survey completely. Only one completed "[Teacher Survey](#)" is required from each teacher. It is **critical that teachers keep track and complete the Teacher Survey as it helps validate the need for the program's existence and for Utah to continue to participate in at the national level. Teachers must report on the number of students participating in-classroom discussions, how many students prepared writings, and how many students submitted their writings.**

Submission Process and Deadline

- The entry **submission deadline** is **Friday, January 9, 2026**.
- All submissions will be done online via a Qualtrics survey.
- Teachers interested to participate will need to complete the [Qualtrics Registration form](#). Teachers will receive a specialized link for distribution to students. No deadline for preregistration. It is highly recommended to register early.
- **Webinar on "Teacher Support and Resources":** Tuesday, September 23, 2025 from 3:00 PM - 3:30 PM. Please use this [Zoom link](#) if you would like to know more about Utah's DtWT Challenge, submission process, and lesson plans.

Selection Criteria

All entries will be reviewed by Utah's Do the Write Thing Committee, the Utah State Board of Education Prevention and Student Services Team, and VIP judges.

The 2025 DtWT Challenge VIP judges included: Jill Bowers, Author; Gina Butters, Superintendent, Weber School District; Aspen Florence, Educational Consultant, Solutions Within Consulting; Emily Green, Fourteenth District Board Member, Utah State Board of Education; Chair Matt Hymas, Second District Board Member, Utah State Board of Education; Kimberlee Irvine, Director, Secondary English Language Art Curriculum, Weber School District; Matt Pennington, State Security Chief, Utah Department of Public Safety; Sarah Reale,

Fifth District Board Member, Utah State Board of Education; and Adeline White, 2024 Utah's Do the Write Thing National Finalist. Entries will be judged based on content, originality and responsiveness to the three questions as listed on page 1.

Grammar and spelling will not be used as criteria for judging entries, as this is an anti-violence initiative and the priority is to encourage students to examine the aspects of youth violence.

Encourage your students to describe what they feel are the causes of youth violence and offer specific suggestions about what they as individuals can do to reduce youth violence in their homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Personal responsibility for responding to the problem of youth violence should be emphasized. Students who share personal experiences about the impact of youth violence on their lives and the lives of their peers consistently receive top scores — for these reasons fictional stories are highly discouraged. The panel of judges will be looking at how well your students present their views on these matters and scoring will be based on the following criteria: Question Responsiveness, Content/Ideas, and Originality/Voice/Honesty.

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion is not mandatory for participation in the Challenge. However, over the years we have found that participating students and their teachers gain much from the connections that result from exchanges about the impact of youth violence that occur in pre-writing classroom discussions. Teachers relate their amazement at the openness and honesty of classroom discussions. These discussions present excellent opportunities to identify and prevent youth problems before they reach a critical level.

Many teachers whose classes have participated in the Challenge have invited speakers knowledgeable about youth violence issues to lead pre-writing discussions. Other teachers have provided their students with selected readings or newspaper articles about youth violence in advance of the discussion to stimulate thought. Speakers or articles that emphasize personal responsibility on the part of students for responding to the problems of youth violence prove to be particularly useful.

The **National Campaign to Stop Violence** [website](#) has a discussion paper on the causes of and solutions for youth violence and other national resources that are helpful. The discussion paper is based upon writings of national finalists from the 2000 Challenge. Feel free to download and copy this material for classroom use or use any of the other materials available on the website.

Utah's DtWT Challenge [website](#) includes several lesson plans and Utah State Finalist books from prior years.

Consider the following sample questions to generate discussion among your students before they prepare their entries for the Challenge:

- How does youth violence affect your daily life?
- Where are you confronted with youth violence? Your home? Your school? Your neighborhood?
- What are some of the causes of youth violence in your community?
- What can you as an individual do to reduce youth violence in your community?

Standard Alignment

The “DtWT Challenge” has been reviewed by a panel of highly qualified public school teachers. The Challenge has been aligned to meet all the English Language Arts Standards in Writing for Grades 7 and 8 (Standards W.7.1 - W7.10 and W8.1 - W8.10). Please note that we have determined Standards W.7.2 and W.8.2 to only be applicable to nonfiction submissions.

Student Recognition

LOCAL LEVEL

Each writing will be read a minimum of three times by students from local universities. The two highest average scorers for the first round of reading will be selected from each school as State’s finalists. **Teachers, please review all writings and make an assessment if there is a potential issue such as ongoing abuse or suicidal threats and take appropriate professional actions. In addition, past experiences have shown that a significant number of students’ writings have been disqualified due to insufficient information such as lack of parent signatures. Please make every effort to enter all necessary and required information so your students’ writings will qualify and be evaluated.**

STATE LEVEL

Two writings per participating school will be selected as State’s finalists and will be invited to attend a recognition luncheon where the top two authors will be announced in April 2025. State finalists will receive a scholarship deposit to their My529 Education Saving Account. The top two writings, as “National Finalists” or “Ambassadors,” will be announced at the recognition luncheon. The Utah DtWT Committee of the Utah State Board of Education hosts a recognition luncheon in late April (usually the fourth Friday of the month) to honor the finalists. The finalists, students’ parents, teacher, and principal will be invited to attend the recognition luncheon. **Utah DtWT will accommodate travel expenses for finalists and invited guests who live more than 50 miles radius of Salt Lake County according to the State’s travel policy.**

The Utah DtWT Committee will publish the writing of finalists and will distribute the publication to community, business, and governmental leaders as well as the National Do the Write Thing Campaign. This book will also be posted on the Prevention [website](#).

NATIONAL LEVEL

The top 24 writings, 12 boys and 12 girls, from across State will be selected and forwarded to VIP judges for final scoring and will be selected for two runners-up, and one “National Finalist” or “Ambassador for Peace.” The Ambassador will represent Utah and participate in various activities include attending the annual Promising Youth Conference at Snowbird, Utah 2nd week of May, being recognized at the Utah State Board of Education board meeting in May or June and attending the National Recognition Week activities sponsored by the Kuwait-America Foundation and the Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science in Washington DC in July. The Ambassador’s writing, along with other Ambassadors’ writings across the nation, will be published and placed in the Library of Congress. Teachers, please inform your students of these potential commitments if selected as National Finalists.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact [Cuong Nguyen](#) at (801) 538-7790 or cuong.nguyen@schools.utah.gov with any questions.



Writing is the core component of the DtWT Challenge. After classroom discussions about youth violence, participating middle school students are asked by their teachers to make a commitment not to be involved in violence and provide written answers to three questions:

1. How has violence affected my life?
2. What are the causes of youth violence?
3. What can I do to reduce youth violence?

The DtWT experience is flexible, allowing for adaptation as needed by school districts and individual classrooms. Thus, the writing component of DtWT can cover significant portions of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

DtWT and Standards Alignment

WRITING

Essays that include a narrative component, such as those that address the first question, can fulfill 3.A-E for grades 6, 7, and 8.

Essays that address the second two questions can fulfill 1.A-E, 2.A-F, 7, 8, and 9 for grades 6, 7, and 8.

All essays can be used to fulfill 4 for grades 6, 7, and 8.

Depending on the level of teacher involvement in students' writing for the DtWT Challenge, the program can be used to fulfill 5 (peer review), 6 (technology), and 10 (writing over a range of time and revision) for grades 6, 7, and 8.

7 th Grade	8 th Grade
7.1.A-E	8.1.A-E
7.2.A-F	8.2.A-F
7.3.A-E	8.3.A-E
7.4	8.4
7.5	8.5
7.6	8.6
7.7	8.7
7.8	8.8
7.9.A-B	8.9.A-B
7.10	8.10

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Classroom discussions, before and after presenting DtWT can be used to fulfill 1.B-D for grades 6, 7, and 8.

7 th Grade	8 th Grade
7.1.A-E	8.1.A-E

DtWT Student Writing Evaluation Rubric

Top student writings should answer the three questions posed about youth violence, recount personal experiences and suggest solutions that can be initiated by the student and other individuals. Top student writings should be moving pieces of written expression.

Area	Exemplary 25 to 21 pts	Strong 20 to 16 pts	Proficient 15 to 11 pts	Developing 10 to 6 pts	Beginning 5 to 1 pts	Score
CONTENT: Ideas <i>main theme</i> <i>supporting details</i>	Exceptionally clear, focused, engaging with relevant, strong supporting detail	Clear, focused, interesting ideas with appropriate detail	Evident main idea with some support which may be general or limited	Main idea may be cloudy because supporting detail is general or off-topic	Lacks central idea; development is minimal or non-existent	___/25
Originality: Voice <i>personality</i> <i>sense of audience</i>	- Engaging, sincere - Strong sense of audience - Shows emotion: humor, honesty, suspense or life	- Appropriate to audience and purpose - Writer behind the words comes through	- Evident commitment to topic - Inconsistent or dull personality	- Voice may be inappropriate or non-existent - Writing may seem mechanical	- Writing is inauthentic - No hint of this writer; may be plagiarized	___/25
Originality: Honesty	Honest, expressive retelling of personal experiences and evaluation of causes of and solutions for violence	Honest if occasionally clumsy retelling of personal experiences and causes of and solution for violence	Honest retelling of personal experiences, but causes of and solutions are unoriginal	Superficial retelling of personal experience. Predictable causes of and solutions for violence	Ideas expressed seem to be borrowed from other individuals or sources	___/25
Question Responsiveness <i>How has youth violence affected my life?</i> <i>What are the causes of youth violence?</i> <i>What can I do about youth violence?</i>	- All three questions addressed - Connections between questions are interrelated and coherent	All three questions addressed with connections to one another	All three questions addressed, but one question dominated	Three questions addressed but connections among questions are weak	Only one Question Addressed	___/25

No two essays should receive the same score.

Total: ___/100

Please mark the primary cause of youth violence identified in this writing:

- | | | | |
|--|--|--|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Abuse | ☐ Media | ☐ Poverty | ☐ Prejudice / |
| ☐ Peer Pressure/
Gangs | ☐ Weapon
Availability | ☐ Jealousy | Intolerance |
| ☐ Bullying/Gossip/
Teasing | ☐ Poor Parent/
Environment | ☐ War | ☐ Human Nature |
| ☐ Stress/Anger/
Depression | ☐ Low Self-Esteem /
to look cool | ☐ Divorce | ☐ Other _____ |
| | | ☐ Drugs/Alcohol | |

Reader Comments [make comments **ONLY** if there is an issue like ongoing abuse, suicidal threats, suspected plagiarism or something else we need to follow-up on with the school]: