



Optimist International Essay Contest Official Topic for the 2025 - 2026 School Year is:

**“How My Acts of Service Help Me Understand What My Community
Means to Me”**

Essay Contest Rules

1. Participants must write on the official contest topic for the current year.
2. Each entry must begin with a **Title Page** containing the official topic, number of words, writer's name, address, phone number, name of school and date of birth.
3. The **official topic** should be at the top of the title page and at the top of page 1. (penalty of 3 points)
4. Essays must be typed, double-spaced and single-sided. (Deduction of 5 points per each infraction-max 15 pts)
4. The word count must also be listed at the top of page 1. (penalty of 5 points)
5. Essays must contain at least 700 words but no more than 800 words. Every word of the essay is counted. This does not include the title, bibliography, or footnotes. Hyphenated words count as 1 word. (Deduction of 5 points for each 25 words over/under limit). Words are to be counted manually.
6. Each page of the essay must be numbered starting with page 1, **not** including the title page. The numbers must be centered at the bottom of each page.
7. Any quotations or copyrighted material used in the essay must be identified properly, using a recognized citation format. For example, use of a specific writer's format (such as MLA, APA, Chicago style). Failure to identify non-original material will result in disqualification.
8. No reference can be made in the essay that identifies the contestant, parents, school, community, sponsoring Optimist Club or District. (Deduction of 5 points or fraction, based on the degree of identification)
9. The essay must be written in English.
10. The entry must be stapled together in the upper left-hand corner. Covers of any type are not accepted. This rule only applies to those entries that are mailed. If the entry is emailed, this rule does not apply.

NOTE: The submission deadline is January 31, 2026