

Writing Questions for Competitions

These suggestions are taken from a presentation by JoLene Bloom
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1. Do your homework or background research before writing questions. Do NOT rely on your memory.
Make a folder to throw good ideas in. Keep a file of a wide variety of topics. Social studies are more than Presidents and amendments. Math is more than algebra and geometry. Write from those resources.
2. *Be precise in stating the question or command.* Use clear content stems at the first of the question. Do not mask the answer the student is to give.
Good: What law . . .? Give the first and last name of the person . . . In what country. . ? Name either the individual or the country . . . Name both . . .
Poor: Where . . .? Who . . . (when you also want a first name)
Poor: If a person was to hear the following sentence: I'm a dead leaf -- leaf would be what figure of speech?
3. *Place question words and answer expectations at the beginning of each question.*
DO: Name BOTH the author and the work which contains the following lines: "Once upon a midnight . .
In degrees Celsius and at sea level, at what temperature will pure water boil?
Don't: The name of the president is who? The (city) is found where?
4. *When asking for a name, include both the first and last name in your answer.* Although the student need only give a last name, if the student also gives a first name, it too must be correct. Ansel Adams is not Samuel Adams. Edward Kennedy is not John Kennedy. When the first name is not required, place the first name in parentheses. This helps your moderators & judges.
5. *Include pronunciation guides for all difficult names and terms.*
6. *Include ALL possible answers:*
Rio Grande is known as the Rio Bravo in Mexico.
South Africa's official name is the Republic of South Africa.
The Falkland Islands are also known as the Malvinas.
The First lady. Laura Bush. The President's wife
Morril Act is also The Land Grant Act of 1862.
United Kingdom is Great Britain or the United Kingdom of Great Britain & Northern Ireland.
Marshal Plan is the European Recovery Program.
Equivalent math answers in whole numbers, mixed numbers, fractions, and decimals
Equivalent temperatures in degrees Celsius, degree Fahrenheit, Kelvins
Mythology names from the Roman, Greek, Chinese, Egyptian, and American Indian.
Equivalent answers in different units: feet per second or miles per hour; meters per second or kilometers per hour.
7. *Include incorrect answers that are very similar to the correct answer and are often given.*
Claude Monet is not Edvard Manet
Blank verse is not the same as Free verse.
Be clear that only Laura Bush is to be accepted and not "The First Lady" or George W Bush's wife.
England is not the same as Great Britain.

8. *Cross-check answers for accuracy. Double check spelling and dates.*
9. *When quoting a literary work or speech, include the reference source in the answer information.*
10. *Write out all abbreviations.*
11. *Specify how much of the answer is essential to win the points; the question should indicate the same.*
 Name three of the U.S. States in alphabetical order. Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas or Arizona, California, Delaware but not Ohio, Iowa, Maine
12. *Include enough information to narrow the interpretation to ONE answer.*
13. *Be generous with time limits on questions requiring computations. The point is to have a team answer the question, not frustrate them. Minimum time on any math/science computation is 30 seconds; maximum should not exceed 120 seconds.*
14. *Include reading instructions for all formulas, equations, and/or symbols. For example: $(2 + 4x)(3x + 5) = 9$ (Read as "the quantity two plus four X times the quantity three X plus five equals nine.)*
15. *Math answers must be in lowest terms, but can be in various forms: decimal, fraction, mixed number, and scientific notation.*
 5 hundredths = one-twentieth = five times 10 to the negative (or minus) two power
16. *Mark titles and names with italics, underlining, or capitalization to indicate a painting, song title, book title, boat name, text, etc.*
 In what year did the Santa Maria sail on her maiden voyage?
17. *Be sure that the question can "stand on its own" without the help of naming the subject category or out of context, without additional information.*
18. *Don't ask multiple questions on the same topic. One Mark Twain question per tournament is sufficient, unless you are doing a special category of questions in a round.*
19. *Collect information from reading the daily newspaper/monthly magazines. Remember the year in review questions must come from these three news magazines: *Time*, *Newsweek*, *US News and World Report*.*
20. *Questions should cause the kids to think, not memorize. Poor: Who wrote . . .? Better: Pose a question that indicates the students had read the book, play, or other literary work.*
21. *Do **not** make two or three option question:*
 True and False questions or questions with only two logical possibilities allow the second team an advantage. (Poor: Name the formations growing from the floor of caves. Stalactites/stalagmites)
 Multiple choice questions narrow the percentage of possible answering with the first team's incorrect answer.
 Questions with multi-answers need to be fair and reasonable - remember that the teams have 10 seconds to consult before **time** is called.

22. Ask **positive** *Year in Review* questions. After the answer, include the reference (magazine, issue date, & page #) where the question was drawn.