Harvard International Review Academic Writing Contest Submission Guide

**Updated February 2026*

Participants will have a choice of three different themes. **Please note which prompt you have chosen at the top of your submission.**

Junior Contest Prompt:

Inventions that Changed How We Live

People invent new tools and machines to solve problems, and many of these inventions end up greatly affecting societal life. Students can also write about inventions that help schools, protect the environment, or make communities safer.

Senior Contest Prompts:

Theme A: Global Culture in the Digital Era

From social media and streaming platforms to online communities and digital art, technology is reshaping how culture is created, shared, and understood across borders. We invite students to explore how identity, language, tradition, and cultural influence evolve in an interconnected world. Possible topics include global youth culture, digital diaspora communities, cultural preservation online, internet-driven activism, and the international spread of music, film, and sports fandom.

Theme B: Security in a Multipolar World

Nations face new challenges in managing conflict, deterrence, and cooperation. We encourage analysis of how military technology, shifting alliances, and emerging powers are transforming international security. Students may look at topics such as cyber warfare, drones and autonomous weapons, nuclear deterrence, regional arms races, space security, or the role of international institutions in preventing conflict.

Theme C: Technology, Innovation, and Power

We invite students to analyze how technological breakthroughs alter global relationships and social structures. Possible topics include the role of technology in warfare, industrialization, space exploration, public health, surveillance, or economic development.

Your articles should analyze one of these themes through the lens of any potential category, including Agriculture, Business, Cybersecurity, Defense, Education, Employment & Immigration, Energy & Environment, Finance & Economy, Public Health, Science & Technology, Space, Trade, and Transportation. Please note that your article should examine the theme from a global perspective rather than focusing on the United States.

Links to Example HIR Articles in Each Category

Note: These articles are not tied to the contest themes, but they demonstrate how HIR articles should look.

Agriculture

Green Gold: Making Money (and Fighting Deforestation) with Yerba Mate

Soil Degradation and Crippling Debt: The Agrarian Crisis in India

Cybersecurity

Consent by Default: When Civil Society Uses Surveillance

Too Much Information: Ineffective Intelligence Collection

Defense

Europe's Old Beacon of New Hope: The Overdue Creation of a European Army

All Mine: The United States and the Ottawa Treaty

Education

Cutthroat Academia: Invisible Innovators

Ending Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa with Online Education

Employment and Immigration

Non-Existent Humans: How Stateless Persons are Forced to Work Informally

Human Citizenship by Investment: Transactions of National Identity

Energy and Environment

The Forgotten Potential of Ukraine’s Energy Reserves

Evolving Markets: LNG and Energy Security in Europe

Business, Finance, and Economics

Greyed Out: Informal Economies and the COVID-19 Recovery

Inflated Egos or Deflated Spirits? Divergent Responses to the Pandemic Recession

Don’t Cry for Me, Again: The Risk of a Ninth Argentine Default

Public Health

West Africa and COVID-19: A Model for Effective Mitigation with Limited Resources
Moving the Needle: The Politics of the Coronavirus Vaccine

Science and Technology

Africa’s Growing Scientific Communities: A New Renaissance
The Lithium Triangle: Where Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia Meet

Trade

The Damning Legacy of Remittance in a COVID world: Case Study South Asia
The Trade War That No One Is Talking About

Transportation

The 737 MAX and the Future of Commercial Aviation
Cycling Towards Progress: Improving Worldwide Bicycle Facilities

Law and Diplomacy

Erdogan’s Attempts for Control of the Greek Press and the Eastern Mediterranean
Supervising Surveillance: Applying International Law to the Global Surveillance State

Writing Style: Overview

Submissions should present an analytically backed perspective on an under-appreciated global issue.

Excellent HIR articles will aim to present an issue holistically from a balanced perspective. Evidence and nuance are critical. Submissions should be well-researched, well-informed, and formal in style and prose.

The HIR does not accept op-eds, otherwise known as editorials or opinion pieces for its competition. Articles are expected to have a thesis but should not have an agenda. Submissions should also not be merely a collection of facts.

As a journalist organization, we ask that submissions follow the following adapted version of the HIR's Style Guide. We also ask that submissions are culturally sensitive, fact-checked, and respectful.

Length

Articles should be at least 800 words but not exceed 1,200 words (not counting diagrams, tables of data, or authorship declaration)

Citations & Sources

All factual claims must be backed by a citation from a reliable source. All ideas that are not your own must be properly attributed. **Citations must be made via hyperlinks**. Non-digital sources are welcome but must be cited properly as per AP Style. See HIR articles for examples of using hyperlinks for citations.

AI Policy

The usage of ChatGPT and other AI Tools is *strictly* prohibited. Judges will be running all articles through multiple AI checkers, and articles that receive high AI generation scores across multiple checkers will be disqualified.

Evaluation Rubric

See below for the rubric used to grade submissions to the Harvard International Review Academic Writing Contest.

	1 (D/F)	2 (C+/-)	3 (B+/-)	4 (A)	5 (A+)
Content					
Topic	The topic of the article has no relation to international affairs	The topic is tangentially related to international affairs	The topic is related to international affairs but shows no clear connection back to the theme	Topic is related to international affairs and connects to the theme but is largely covered by mainstream media	Topic is underappreciated in mainstream media, highly relevant to international affairs, and clearly connects back to the theme
Introduction	Introduction is missing	Introduction is confusing and unrelated to the main premise of the piece	Introduction is related to content of the article but is unengaging	Introduction effectively sets up the author's argument	Introduction pulls the reader in with a "hook" and effectively sets up the author's argument
Structure / Transitions	The submission is completely disorganized, there are no topic sentences or transitions between paragraphs	The submission's structure is confusing and befuddles the author's argument. There is minimal use of topic sentences or transitions between paragraphs	The submission employs some topic sentences and intra-paragraph transitions, but the argument could be presented in a more organized fashion	The submission employs acceptable topic sentences and transitions between paragraphs	The submission employs topic sentences that are concise and appropriate; transitions between paragraphs are smooth and natural. The submission has a clear logical flow of ideas that guides the reader through the premise.
Use of Evidence	The author consistently makes claims without providing evidence	The author often makes claims without providing evidence	The author offers evidence for most claims, but the evidence is	The author offers evidence for the large majority of claims and the	The author consistently provides evidence that is highly relevant and compelling

			weak or unconvincing	evidence is generally sound	
Analysis of Evidence	Analysis is minimal or lacking	The author sometimes to analyze the evidence he/she provides and historical trends	The author sometimes employs analysis that draws somewhat logical conclusions from the evidence they provide. The analysis mirrors that of an average high school student.	The author consistently employs analysis that draws logical conclusions from the evidence they provide. The level of analysis mirrors that of an above average high school student.	The author consistently employs analysis that draws logical conclusions from the evidence they provide; the author's analysis is creative and brings the evidence "to life." The analysis mirrors that of a journalist, analyst, or academic.
Overall Coherence of Argument	The argument is incoherent or missing	The argument is difficult to define and lacks sufficient substance or originality	The argument has some merit but misses several key points related to the issue	The argument has merit and is akin to that of a first-year college student	The argument mirrors that of a sophisticated analyst or academic
Style					
Tone	The tone is extremely casual and completely inappropriate for academic or professional writing	The tone is too casual and likely inappropriate for academic or professional writing OR the piece is clearly an op-ed	The tone is generally appropriate but the piece is more an op-ed than pure analysis	The tone is generally appropriate for an HIR article but has some areas that are either too casual or too similar to an op-ed	The tone is consistent with previously published HIR articles
Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes litter the piece and making it nearly impossible to understand	Spelling, grammar, and punctuation mistakes clearly indicate that the piece was not written by a professional	There are 7-10 mistakes related to spelling, punctuation, and grammar	There are 3-6 mistakes related to spelling, punctuation, and grammar	There are 0-2 mistakes related to spelling, punctuation, and grammar

Adherence to the HIR Style Guide	The author most likely did not read the HIR style guide	The author kept minimal fidelity to the HIR style guide	The author followed about the half of the HIR style guide	The author clearly made a concerted effort to adhere to the HIR style guide	There is perfect or near perfect adherence to the HIR style guide
Citations	Less than half of factual claims are backed by a citation, ideas that are not the author's are not properly attributed. Citations are not made by hyperlinks.	About half of factual claims are backed by a citation; all ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. Citations are not made by hyperlinks.	About half of factual claims are backed by a citation; all ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. Citations are made via hyperlinks.	The large majority of factual claims are backed by a citation; all ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. Citations are made via hyperlinks.	All factual claims are backed by a citation; all ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. Citations are made via hyperlinks.
Source Quality	The author does not use or reference sources.	The author uses sources minimally and/or the sources used are not reliable and high-quality.	Author draws on some sources of average to high-quality. The use of sources is below the level of previously published HIR articles.	Author uses reliable sources for the majority of their analysis. Evidence quality is near the level of previously published HIR articles.	Author draws on varied, reliable, and high-quality sources throughout. Evidence quality is consistent with previously published HIR articles.
Overall Ease of Reading	The submission is nearly impossible to read	The submission is confusing and difficult to read	The submission is easy to read in some parts and confusing in others	The submission is generally easy to read with only a few small areas of confusion	The submission is easy to read and is near the writing level of an HIR article
TOTAL (0-60)					

Writing Style: Detailed Guide

Acronyms

- Most acronyms should be used by first spelling out the full name before writing the acronym in parentheses; afterwards, the acronym can be used.
    - Example: "The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was signed into law by President Trump on March 27, 2020."

    - Exceptions are for very common acronyms such as NATO, GDP, HIV/AIDS, UK, CNN, EU, etc. In such scenarios, one is not required to spell out the words and can instead automatically use an acronym.
        - Example: "The UK decided to…" One would <u>not</u> need to write, "The United Kingdom (UK) decided to…"

- Avoid overusing acronyms.

- For the US, EU, and UN, spell out the name when used as a noun, but use the acronym as an adjective.
    - Example: The United States decided to intervene in Afghanistan. (noun)

    - Example: The US committee approved the draft resolution. (adjective)

- For foreign acronyms, write the acronym first and then write out the expanded, English-translated words in parentheses.
    - Example: "Aleksandar Vucic's SNS Party (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats)…"
        - The SNS Party is a *foreign* (Serbian) acronym, so its acronym is written first and is then followed by its *English-translated*, expanded word form (Alliance of Independent Social Democrats).

Capitalization

- Common nouns are only capitalized if essential to a name. However, common nouns are always lower-case if in plural tense.
    - Example: "The Democratic <u>P</u>arty…" The word "party" is a common noun, but when it is essential to a name (i.e. a political party), it becomes "<u>P</u>arty" and is capitalized."

    - Example: “The Democratic and Republican parties…” Despite the use of essential proper nouns, the word “parties” remains lower case because the subject is now in plural tense (there are two political parties that are being discussed).

- Seasons are only capitalized if a part of an essential name, otherwise they remain lower-case.
    - Example: “The Summer Olympics have been postponed because of COVID-19.” (essential → capitalized)
    - Example: After completing their finals, students were leaving home for winter break. (non-essential → lower-case)

- Titles (i.e. president, chancellor, etc.) are capitalized if preceding a name. Titles are lower-case if discussed abstractly.
    - Example: “President Barack Obama won the 2008 US presidential election.” (“President” precedes the name “Barack Obama” and is thereby essential and requires capitalization.)
    - Example: “The chancellor of Germany is elected every four years.” (This is an abstract description of a type of political office in a specific country; therefore, the political title is lower-case.)

- Capitalize place articles if not in English, otherwise put it in lower-case.
    - Example: “the Caucasus” (Here, the place article “the” is in English and therefore does not require capitalization.)
    - Example: “Los Angeles is facing poor air quality because of the 2020 California wildfires.” (Here, the place article “Los” is not an English word and is therefore capitalized.)

Citations and Sourcing

- The *HIR* does not use footnotes.

- **Plagiarism:** The *HIR’s* general guideline is that **three or more words or any distinct phrase or word unique to another source should be treated as a quotation.** Writers are required to place quotation marks around such words and then hyperlink their source to the strongest verb and/or most important noun in the sentence.
    - Example: “President Trump announced Monday that the United States would suspend new H-1B visas.”

    - Generally, try to limit your hyperlink to *one-three words*. The shorter the better because hyperlinks can become distracting!
        - **To hyperlink:** highlight one-three words in the sentence, and press command (Mac) or control (PC) + K to hyperlink.

- **Research:** Sources should be credible, not just anything from the internet (academic publications from prominent institutions can generally be trusted more than the average dot-com). If a source is questionable and widely criticized but still must be used in an article, the article should at least recognize the bias or criticism.

Foreign Expressions

- Briticisms: Use only if they are essential to a name.
    - Example: "President Donald Trump claimed it was an 'honor to…'" Here, you would not write "honour."

    - Example: "The Honourable Company of Air Pilots…" Here, a Briticism is used because it is a part of an official name and is thereby essential.

- Non-English terms: Use only if they are common, essential, and/or explained
    - Example: "laissez-faire" is common and thereby acceptable
    - Example: "vis-à-vis" is generally understandable and would be acceptable
    - Example: "volksparteien" is uncommon and would therefore only be acceptable if paired with an explanation of what it means (i.e., "The volksparteien, or (explanation here)…")
    - Use non-English terms where essential. We try to avoid pretension since it distracts from the reading experience.

Symbols and Numbers

- Ampersands (&): Avoid unless a part of an official name.
    - Example: "Proctor & Gamble" is acceptable; "He & she said…" is not acceptable.

- Currency:
    - US$100 (NO SPACES)
    - Foreign currencies should have the numerical amount followed by currency name (lower-case) and a US-dollar conversion in parentheses.
        - Example: 10 billion yen (US$95,634,300.00)

- Percent (%): Spell the word percent as one word. Not %. Remember, percent is NOT the same as a percentage point.

- Numbers: Sentences begin with words, not numeric symbols ("One" not "1"). Spell out numbers less than 10 ("one," "two," etc.) except for: decimals, but these should be avoided wherever possible. Also spell out "millions", "billions," etc.,

but not “thousands.” Big numerals have commas in them (like “1,554”) (with no spaces).
    - Example: five to six percent → NOT 5-6 percent
    - Example: six million → NOT 6,000,000
    - Example: 6,000 → NOT 6, 000 (notice the unnecessary space after 6)
    - Example: 5.6 percent → not fix point 6 percent

Titles and Names

- Common titles: Avoid Mr./Ms./Mrs./Miss; the *HIR* instead prefers using names. However, titles that are particularly exemplary of merit (i.e., Dr.) should be included as a sign of respect for the individual discussed. In these cases, use the title once and proceed with just the last name after that.

- Include both the first and last name of individuals once; afterwards, refer to the individual by their last name (this is applicable to “titled” individuals, as well).
    - Example: “President Donald Trump…” → afterwards, merely write “Trump…”

- Middle initials: Almost always unnecessary and should be avoided.

- Titles of works: In general, longer or bigger works have italicized titles whereas shorter or smaller works have titles in quotation marks.
    - Italicize titles of books, newspapers, magazines, publications, and movies
        - Example: “The *Harvard International Review (HIR)* is an on-campus publication and magazine.”
    - Quotation marks around articles, short essays, TV episodes
        - Example: “The article “Trump Administration to Ban Tik Tok and WeChat From U.S. App Stores” by…”

Pronouns

- **<u>Avoid</u>** gender pronouns (him, her, they)
- “They” is officially acceptable as a pronoun for a singular individual but only where the person identifies in that way. We avoid gendering in 99.9% of instances.

  Instead:
  1. First and last name of individual
  2. Afterwards, last name

Cultural Sensitivity

- Minority groups are respectful capitalized
    - Indigenous

    - Black
    - Hispanics
    - white → not capitalized

- Koran vs Qur'an
    - Qur'an more common and accepted

Place Names

- Consistency: If it is "Russia" in the first paragraph, it does not become "The Russian Federation" in the second. Be simple and consistent.

- United States or America: Use "United States" for the country and "America(s)" for the hemisphere.
    - The "Americas" would be in context to the Western Hemisphere (i.e., North, Central, and South America).
- **<u>Politically sensitive place names</u>:** Be careful about which spelling is used or how a name is presented, as that may carry substantial political implications. For instance, Ukrainians prefer to call their country "Ukraine" instead of "the Ukraine," as "the" harkens back to when the area was a Soviet territory (or a Russian satellite); they also prefer the spelling "Kyiv" to "Kiev," which reflects the differences between the city's name in the Ukrainian and Russian languages.

    - **While HIR articles tend to be analytical in nature, the author's perspective on the issue will inherently show through. In that case, what should guide you is what spelling best matches the tone of your piece. However, always tread carefully, as no matter what spelling you choose can leave some people offended. Therefore, avoid the excessive use of politically sensitive place names in your article.**

Miscellaneous (Punctuation, Formatting, etc.)

- Commas: Lists longer than two elements should have commas/semicolons, including the use of the "Oxford comma." Be careful with comma splices.
    - Example: She ate bananas, apples**, (the "Oxford Comma" precedes the last listed term in a set)** and oranges.
    - Example: "She likes apples, he likes oranges" is incorrect. That is a comma splice because two independent sentences are not punctuated correctly. Instead, either use a semicolon or period in such a scenario (She likes apples; he likes oranges.)

- Dates:
    - Avoid ordinal indicators unless for an exceptional date (i.e., "September 14th" is incorrect → instead, "September 14")

    - Decades have no apostrophes (i.e.: 1960s)

- Dashes: **em dashes are used (—) instead of en dashes (–)**. There are no spaces before or after the dash. However, do not overuse dashes; colons typically work better and dashes are usually advised for emphasis.
    - Example: "She wondered why the committee decided to amend the legislation — not to mention…" → INCORRECT; there should not be a space before and after the dash.
    - Example: "She wondered why the committee decided to amend the legislation--not to mention…" → INCORRECT!
    - Example: "She wondered why the committee decided to amend the legislation—not to mention…" → CORRECT; the em dash is appropriately used and formatted!

- Quotes: The *HIR* does not use block quotations for staff-written pieces. Instead, use quotation marks to set off the quoted phrases. Brackets within quoted text may be used to clarify unclear references or phrasings. Brackets should never substantively change the work of the original author you are quoting.
    - Example: "The horor [*sic*] of the legislative effects…" Here, the bracket recognizes a misspelled word from the original quotation.

- Concision: writing concisely is crucial (i.e., "cut" not "cut back," "priority" not "top priority").

- "That" vs. "which":
    - "That" = necessary information
        - No commas
        - Example: "The countries that are not in the EU continue to struggle economically."

    - "Which" = not necessary information
        - Offset by a pair of commas
        - Example: "The former Yugoslavia, which is where Jelena's family is from, is currently…"

- "Who" vs "That":
    - "People that are tall" → WRONG!
    - "People <u>who</u> are tall" → Correct!

- Additional questions? Use AP style rules or contact contest@hir.harvard.edu. We use HIR Style Guide first and AP Style to fill in any gaps in our guide.