



2025–2026 STUDENT PAPER COMPETITION

Theme: Imagine a world without rules or standards—what would happen?

Standards—The Unseen Forces That Keep Our World Running

What is a standard? Simply put, a standard is an agreed-upon way of doing something. It sets specific guidelines for the design, operation, manufacture, and use of nearly everything produced by mankind, as well as requirements for processes, systems, and services. There are standards to protect human health, safety, and the environment, and others to assure that different products work compatibly together.

Standards support our daily activities. In fact, many "invisible standards" are the behind-the-scenes rules that make our interconnected world function smoothly. Consider these everyday mysteries:

- How do your favorite shows stream smoothly across all your devices?
- How do you know your favorite food is safe to eat?
- Why are electric car charging stations becoming universal across automakers?
- How are you able to use your debit card in any ATM around the world?
- How can an entire school's worth of electronic devices all connect to the same WiFi network?
- How do you know that when you buy a light bulb, you will be able to screw it into your lamp?

Requirements to Enter:

1. All entries must be submitted by **5pm ET on June 5, 2026** to LRajchel@ansi.org.
2. Must be written and submitted by: High school student(s) **OR** associate, undergraduate, or graduate student(s) in any discipline enrolled during the period of September 2025 to June 2026 in the United States or its territories.
3. Must be an original—not AI generated—work, and not previously published.* ANSI staff is familiar with the tone and style of AI-generated content; winning submissions will demonstrate creativity, voice, and personalization that stands out from typical LLM output.

**Copyright will remain with the author; winners grant publication rights to ANSI, as well as the right to release entries to other media*

INSTRUCTIONS

A. Choose ONE area where invisible standards operate with hidden specifications that impact the world/greater society.

- Technology & Connectivity (USB-C, WiFi protocols, app compatibility)
- Digital Life (Social media, QR codes, e-commerce, streaming)
- Safety & Health (Food safety, medical devices, building codes)
- Transportation (Electric vehicle charging, traffic systems, aviation)
- Communication (Internet protocols, phone networks, emergency systems)
- Physical Infrastructure (Buildings, bridges, water and stormwater systems, waste management)

Or propose your own topic! Please send ideas to LRajchel@ansi.org for review and approval.

B. Investigate and reveal “how standards keep our world running” and address these questions:

- How do standards make things in your chosen area function?
- What problems do they solve? Explain the challenges (or chaos) these standards address.
- What’s the impact? Explore how this affects your daily life and what would happen if it disappeared tomorrow.

C. Make it personal! Show why standards matter in your selected area by exploring:

- Your personal connection: How do standards shape *your* daily experiences in your chosen area?
- Think bigger picture, with standards in mind. What are the broader economic, social, or safety implications for the future?

Formatting Requirements:

- Include a title and list of names of all contributing authors, their contact details, and the affiliated high school or institute of higher education
- Preface with an abstract of no more than 400 words
- Fewer than 2,000 words (not including the abstract or any notes, tables, charts and bibliography, which may not exceed 3 pages)
- Written in English and suitable for publication (final editing assistance will be provided by ANSI before publication of winning papers)
- Submitted in an editable electronic format, such as Microsoft Word (no PDFs, please) in 12-point font.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION & RESOURCES

Questions from schools and/or students concerning any aspect of the competition (theme, requirements, etc.) or seeking guidance on expectations of the submissions should be directed to Lisa Rajchel at (212) 642-4932 or LRajchel@ansi.org.

Additional Information

Submissions will be reviewed by top-level experts in the standards community participating on ANSI's Committee on Education as well as by ANSI staff.

Winning entries will be published on ANSL.org and potentially in other media outlets. Winning submissions will be shared with and widely read by the domestic and international standards community, including experts in government, industry, professional societies, and academic institutions.

Each submission that meets the competition criteria will receive a \$20 gift card as a small token of ANSI's appreciation, as well as a certificate of submission for the student and the school. The winning paper submitted by a high school student will receive a \$1,000 prize; the winning paper submitted by a student from an institute of higher learning will receive a \$1,500 prize. ANSI reserves the right to award no prizes based on the determination of the judges. **The winning papers will be announced in August 2026.**

Resources for Research

ANSI has developed a list of suggested resources for research and references to start you on your journey:

- Materials for K-12 students:
<https://ansi.org/education/activities/standards-student-programs/k-12-students>
- Learn more about **voluntary consensus standards and American National Standards**.
- Search a **list of approved American National Standards**.
- Search the **organizations accredited by ANSI to develop American National Standards**.
- Search for international standards from the **International Organization for Standardization** (ISO)
- Search for international electrotechnical standards from the **International Electrotechnical Commission** (IEC)
- Check out some **user-friendly ANSI resources** that show the breadth of standards' impact.
- Read more about AI on **ANSI's online news archive** or www.ansi.org for more information.

