2025-2026 National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow
Critique & Contest Rules
Entry Deadline: May 15, 2026
Entries must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Central Standard Time
Official Contest Website: https://nact.submittable.com/submit

GENERAL RULES

1. Contestants must be active, dues-paying National ACT members. If a student's National ACT dues have not been paid at the time of submission, the chapter will be invoiced for the student's membership dues in addition to the entry fee. If a student attends a university without an ACT chapter and has not paid individual National ACT dues, an invoice will be sent to the email provided in their submission. Payment must be submitted to remain eligible. If payment is not received, the entry will be disqualified. Submissions close May 15 at 11:59 p.m. CST; therefore, payments must be postmarked by May 16.

2. The National ACT Critique and Contest has six divisions: writing, publication, electronic media, photography, design and layout, and public relations. Each division has multiple categories.

3. All active members of the National ACT organization are eligible to compete in all categories, i.e., undergraduate students will compete against graduate students. To maintain the student focus of this competition, members who hold any faculty appointment at a college or university (full-time, part-time, adjunct, instructor, etc.) are not eligible to compete, even if they are concurrently enrolled as graduate students. Graduate teaching assistants and graduate assistants are eligible. Dues-paying members who graduate in the winter semester are eligible to compete.

4. Each contestant is limited to one individual entry and one group/team entry per category. If a contestant enters more than one entry individually in a single category, only the original entry will be judged.

5. All entries must be student-produced. Although faculty and professional communicators may advise students on their work, students must complete the actual execution.

6. All entries must be uploaded into Submittable; additional guidance is provided for the magazine category. Details are provided with the category's specifications listed below.

7. National ACT reserves the right to disqualify incomplete entries or those not following the Critique & Contest, division, and category rules.

8. If the National ACT vice president or executive adviser determines an entry is in the wrong category, the entry may be moved to an appropriate category. The submitter will be notified.

9. Judges are professionals with disciplinary expertise in the assigned category. The vice president will coordinate the selection and invitation of judges with input from the National ACT officer team. Agricultural communications faculty members and ACT chapter advisers cannot serve as judges.

10. Judges evaluate entries using criteria developed for each division by the National ACT officer team. Judges provide a score and critique comments for each entry. They are asked to highlight the entry's strengths and weaknesses and describe specific changes that could improve its effectiveness. The comments are emailed to the chapter adviser, who is asked to share the information with the contestants.

11. The National ACT executive adviser has the right to use any material submitted to Critique & Contest for sharing winning entries on the National ACT website, in awards presentations, promotional materials, and other educational or organizational purposes. All rights of authorship and copyright remain with the original creator.

12. All entries must be created between May 16, 2025, and May 15, 2026.

13. The entry fee $5 per individual or group entry. Magazine entries are $20 USD per entry. The National ACT organization will invoice each chapter for the number of judged entries.

RECOGNITION
- Awards will be presented during the National ACT business meeting at 2026 Ag Media Summit.
- All winners will be listed in the Critique & Contest Awards presentation slides. The presentation slides will be published on the National ACT Critique & Contest webpage at the conclusion of the conference at which the awards are announced.
- The work by first-place category winners will be published on the National ACT Critique & Contest webpage.
- The first-place winner for each category will receive an engraved award.
- The award of excellence in each division will receive a monetary award and an engraved award.
- All winners can print certificates from a shared file posted to the National ACT website at the conclusion of the conference at which the awards are announced.

CRITIQUE AND CONTEST DIVISIONS AND CATEGORIES

Writing (Page 3)	Publication (Page 3)	Electronic Media (Page 4)	Photography (page 5)	Design and Layout (Page 5)	Public Relations (Page 6)
News Story	Small-format Publication	Audio Package	Scenic	Page Layout	Public Relations Campaign
Short Feature	Magazine	Audio Advertisement	People	Poster or Flyer	Risk/Crisis Communications Plan
Long Feature		Short Video Production	Animal	Logo	Social Media Campaign
Short Personality Profile		Long Video Production	Plant	Infographic	Single Social Media Post
Long Personality Profile		Video Advertisement	Food	Print Advertisement	Single Public Relations Item
Research-related Writing			Other	Electronic Advertisement	
Editorial or Single Blog Entry			Black and White	Blog	
News/Press Release			Photo Series	Web Design	

WRITING DIVISION
Each writing division entry must be submitted online as a **PDF** in manuscript form **(Times New Roman,12-point, double-spaced text with 1-inch margins on letter-size paper). The file name should follow this format: division_category_membername.pdf. For example, writing_newsstory_lastname_firstname.pdf**

An example format is provided on the National ACT's Critique & Contest webpage: https://nactnow.org/contests-awards/. Do not submit photographs with an entry. **Entries in published form will be disqualified.** NOTE: The first-place entries in the writing categories will be entered in the Excellence in Writing competition.

Entries will be judged on readability, originality, organization, use of appropriate writing style (re: AP Style), effectiveness and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. **NEWS STORY**
   Entries should be written in inverted pyramid style and should address a current issue or event. Any word count is acceptable.

2. **SHORT FEATURE STORY**
   Short feature stories include technical, how-to, historical, etc., of 1,000 words or less.

3. **LONG FEATURE STORY**
   Long feature stories include technical, how-to, historical, etc., of more than 1,000 words.

4. **SHORT PERSONALITY PROFILE**
   Entries should be 1,000 words or less and should focus on a person, business, farm, organization, etc.

5. **LONG PERSONALITY PROFILE**
   Entries should be more than 1,000 words and should focus on a person, business, farm, organization, etc.

6. **RESEARCH-RELATED WRITING**
   Entries should be stories written in a journalistic format AND related to scientific research, either social science or lab science. Any word count is acceptable.

7. **EDITORIAL or SINGLE BLOG ENTRY**
   Entries should be opinion pieces meant to persuade an audience on a specific issue. Any word count is acceptable.

8. **NEWS/PRESS RELEASE**
   Entries should be written to inform and formatted in a traditional release style with a header, headline, dateline, boilerplate, etc. Any word count is acceptable.

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PUBLICATION DIVISION
Each publication division entry must be submitted online as a PDF. Additionally, six copies of the printed magazines are required. NOTE: The first-place entries in the publication categories will be entered in the Excellence in Publications competition.

For the online submission, the file name should follow this format: division_category_membername.pdf. For example, publication_brochure_lastname_firstname.pdf.

Entries will be judged on layout and design, typography, graphics, content, writing quality, effectiveness, and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. **SMALL FORMAT PUBLICATION**
   Entries should be a newsletter, brochure, pamphlet, rack cards, postcards, etc. Entries can be a single item or a series. Entries should be submitted as a PDF of the completed design. Any size or dimension is acceptable.

2. **MAGAZINE**
   The magazine category will be judged using printed copies of the publication. However, all entries must be submitted in two formats:
   1. Online Submission – A PDF version of a single issue must be uploaded.
   2. Mailed Submission – Six physical copies of the same issue as submitted as a PDF must be mailed to the National ACT representative listed below.

   The PDF and mailed copies must be identical in content and format. Magazine entries are $20 USD per entry. NOTE: If a college/university publishes two issues of a student-produced magazine per academic year, the college/university ACT chapter may enter both issues as long as the publication was completed within the contest timeframe (see Rule 12). No more than two issues may be submitted by a chapter.

   All mailed entries **must be postmarked no later than May 15, 2026,** to allow adequate time for distribution to judges.

   Magazine category entries should be mailed to:
   Shelly Legg, National ACT Executive Treasurer
   Oklahoma State University
   Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Leadership
   224 Agricultural Hall
   Stillwater, OK 74078Stillwater, OK 74078

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ELECTRONIC MEDIA DIVISION
All video submissions must be submitted as a YouTube link. The audio entries are uploaded as .mp3 files with the following file name format: **division_category_membername. For example, emedia_audiopackage_lastname_firstname.mp3.** NOTE: The first-place entries in the electronic media categories will be entered in the Excellence in Electronic Media competition.

Entries will be judged on audio quality and/or video quality, production quality, creativity, organization, effectiveness, and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. **AUDIO PACKAGE**
   Entries must be between 30 seconds and 5 minutes in duration. Newscasts, PSAs, podcasts, interviews, documentaries or editorials are eligible to be entered. Entries must be more than a market report.

2. AUDIO ADVERTISEMENT
   Entries must be between 15 seconds and 60 seconds in duration and written to persuade an audience.

3. SHORT VIDEO PRODUCTION
   Entries must be less than 2 minutes in duration.

4. LONG VIDEO PRODUCTION
   Entries must be more than 2 minutes in duration.

5. VIDEO ADVERTISEMENT
   Entries must be between 15 seconds and 60 seconds in duration and produced to persuade an audience.

PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION
Each photo entry must be 5 megabytes or smaller and must be saved in JPEG or JPG format.

Minor photo manipulation, such as color correction or cropping, is allowed; however, removing or adding elements, using photo filters (except in the black and white category), and changing elements in relation to one another are prohibited. NOTE: The first-place entries in the photography categories will be entered in the Excellence in Photography competition.

For submission, the file name should follow this format: division_category_membername.jpg. For example, photo_scenic_lastname_firstname.jpg or for the photo series category, use photo_photoseries_lastname_firstname_photo1.jpg, photo_photoseries_lastname_firstname_photo2.jpg, etc.

Entries will be judged on subject matter, photo quality, composition, effectiveness and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. SCENIC PHOTO
   Images capturing landscapes, outdoor environments or wide natural settings.

2. PEOPLE PHOTO
   Images featuring individuals or groups as the primary subject.

3. ANIMAL PHOTO
   Images highlighting livestock, wildlife or other animals as the main focus.

4. PLANT PHOTO
   Images showcasing crops, flowers, trees or other plant life.

5. FOOD PHOTO
   Images depicting food items, dishes or ingredients as the central subject.

6. OTHER PHOTO
   Images that do not fit into the above categories but still represent strong photographic work.

7. BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO
   Images captured or edited exclusively in black and white; entries must be unique and cannot duplicate submissions in other categories in any format.

8. PHOTO SERIES
   A cohesive set of three to five related images telling a story or exploring a theme; photos used in a series cannot be entered individually and must be uploaded as separate JPEG or JPG files in the "Photo Series Files" upload section of the submission form.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT DIVISION
The entries for page layout, poster or flyer, logo, infographic and advertisement are submitted online as a PDF. The blog and web design entries are submitted as URL addresses. NOTE: The first-place entries in the design and layout categories will be entered in the Excellence in Design and Layout competition.

For submission, the file name should follow this format: division_category_membername.pdf. For example, design_pagelayout_lastname_firstname.pdf.

Entries will be judged on layout and design, color, illustration, typography, usability, effectiveness and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. PAGE LAYOUT
   Entries can include single- or multi-page publication spreads, but they cannot be advertisements.

2. POSTER OR FLYER
   Entries should be a single-page publication promoting an event, cause, etc.

3. LOGO
   Entries can be for a company, organization, individual, event, etc.

4. INFOGRAPHIC
   Entries should be designed to educate or share information with an audience.

5. PRINT ADVERTISEMENT
   Entries can include one- or two-page advertisements, a billboard, etc. Any size is acceptable.

6. ELECTRONIC ADVERTISEMENT
   Entries can include banner ads, pop-ups, leaderboards, etc. Any size is acceptable.

7. BLOG
   Submit the URL to the blog. Ensure your blog will be online and available for judging.

8. WEB DESIGN
   Submit the URL for the website. Ensure your website will be online and available for judging.

PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION
The entries for public relations campaign, risk/crisis communication plan, social media campaign, and single social media post are submitted as PDF files. Please submit a pdf file or a .jpg photo of your public relations single item. The first-place entries in the categories will be automatically entered into the Excellence in Public Relations competition.

For submission, the file name should follow this format: division_category_membername.pdf. For example, design_pagelayout_lastname_firstname.pdf.

Entries will be judged on appropriateness for the audience, readability, creativity, organization, effectiveness and overall appeal. To assist the judges, you will be asked to describe the purpose and ideal audience of each entry.

1. **PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGN**
   Entries should be submitted as a PDF viewbook for a client. The viewbook should include a coordinated set of materials created to support a specific organization/company, goal, event or issue; acceptable materials include purpose/goal, SWOT analysis, logos, news releases, social media posts and/or performance analytics, graphics, fact sheets, media kits, brochures, or other pieces that together form a cohesive PR strategy. Submit one copy in final form. Individual items from this category MAY be entered in other divisions and/or categories.

2. **RISK/CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN**
   Entries should be submitted as a PDF viewbook. The viewbook should outline a coordinated communication strategy designed to anticipate, address or respond to a potential or active risk or crisis. Acceptable materials include a clear purpose/goal, risk assessment, stakeholder analysis, message strategy, holding statements, news releases, social media templates or monitoring plans, graphics, fact sheets and any other components demonstrating a cohesive, well-organized risk or crisis communication strategy. Submit one copy in final form. Individual items from this category MAY be entered in other divisions and/or categories.

3. **SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN**
   Entries should be submitted as a PDF viewbook. The viewbook should showcase a coordinated set of social media materials created to support a specific organization/company, goal, event or issue. Acceptable materials include platform-specific content plans, sample posts, captions, graphics, short-form videos or storyboards, hashtags, scheduling calendars and performance or engagement metrics. Materials should work together to demonstrate a cohesive social media strategy. Submit one copy in final form. Individual items from this category MAY be entered in other divisions and/or categories.

4. **SINGLE SOCIAL MEDIA POST**
   Materials submitted should document one standalone social media post not part of a broader campaign. Entries may come from any platform (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, etc.). Submissions should include a brief explanation of how and why the post was created, the platform used, the intended goals and the target audience(s). Provide post analytics such as reach and engagement. If the post was boosted or promoted, include the dollar amount and the duration of the promotion.

5. **PUBLIC RELATIONS SINGLE ITEM**
   Submit one standalone public relations item. Entries may include finished products or design mockups. All submissions must include a PDF of the final design or mockup, even if the item was produced physically; if the item was physically produced, also include a JPEG/JPG photo of the final item. Entries in this category cannot be entered in any other category. Items may include displays, specialty advertising pieces, promotional products, etc. Examples include mugs, pens, buttons, etc.

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