

The Forbidden Flourish Poliphillegal Hackathon & Youth Forum 2025

Master Document for Contestants

Invitation Letter

Dear Fellow Dreamers,

When we were younger, the world seemed fixable. Not simple, maybe, but at least solvable. We heard about injustice and imagined what we would do differently. We thought: if we could write the rules, they'd be fair. If we could design the systems, they'd work for everyone. Some of that wide-eyed optimism fades with age. But not all of it. Not here.

Last year, over a hundred students from around the world joined the TFF Policy Hackathon with such a spirit. Together, they explored what could be done for civilians trapped in war, and the essays we received didn't shy away from complexity. What we learned was clear: when given a serious chance, people rise to meet it with their ideals.

And that's why we've grown. This year, we're expanding our format—because we want to scale, but also because the world demands it. In the year since our first competition, we've watched global cooperation fray further. We've seen Sustainable Development Goals stall under political pressure, one decade after its birth; small nations still being caught in the crossfire of geopolitical rivalries; and, healthcare becoming less a right and nothing short of a battleground.

So, for 2025, the TFF Policy Hackathon is no longer anchored to a single theme. Instead, we offer a curated set of three regular **Topic Clusters (TCs)**, each grounded in a real topic of crisis:

Rethinking the SDGs

The Small State Delimma—between Giants

Healthcare Justice amid Global Inequality

At the same time, we've also come to recognize that meaningful policy work cannot happen alone. Intersections with other areas of study will also, we believe, present valuable and sometimes surprising insights. For this reason, we're especially proud to introduce a **special Topic Cluster** in partnership with the **PeerPotentials Mock Trial (PPMT)** program:

PPMT's 2025 Special—When the Law Gets it Wrong

Each Topic Cluster is paired with three **Writing Dimensions (WDs)**:

The Mirror—Write to Reflect. Confront the moral tensions and contradictions embedded in the issue.

The Compass—Write to Design. Offer real frameworks, policy paths, or institutional ideas that could change the outcome.

The Voice—Write to Reveal. Tell the human story. Trace the lived experience that gets buried beneath politics.

Some policy questions demand clear-eyed design. Others call for moral reflection. And sometimes, a creative spark is what draws attention to stories long overlooked. For these purposes, each of ***The Mirror***, ***The Compass***, and ***The Voice*** pushes us to engage a problem with multifaceted lenses.

ANNNND there is even **ONE MORE THING** to share. Alongside TFF's own development and on many other occasions, we've watched students, thinkers, and activists continue to engage, argue, and imagine in better ways beyond Hackathon. This spirit of conversation and exchange is at the heart of another major step we're taking in 2025: the launch of the **TFF Youth Forum**, a two-day event (August 6–7) bringing together policy practitioners, scholars, and invited guests to explore the deeper questions behind each Topic Cluster.

Each panel of the **TFF Youth Forum** will be curated by one of our Cluster Chiefs, who will lead discussions, host speakers, and respond to live questions from participants. For Hackathon Participants, the Forum would be an especially great chance to gather inspirations in drafting. Writing is sharpened by dialogue – and this Forum is where those conversations spark.

Finally, as we said last year, you don't need to be a policy wonk to join. You just need the honesty to name what isn't working, and the courage to imagine what could. If you've ever looked at a headline and thought, "surely we can do better than this," you already belong here.

On behalf of the entire Forbidden Flourish team, we invite you to join us in this experiment in constructive dreaming. Pick a question. Find your path.

Let's build something better, one line at a time.

Warm regards,

Tommy Kuang
Founder & Chairman, The Forbidden Flourish

About the Event

The TFF Hackathon, a flagship initiative of The Forbidden Flourish, blends the intensity of a hackathon with the depth of policy inquiry. Unlike traditional debates or MUNs, this competition centers around carefully designed prompts and encourages participants to explore difficult questions through writing, reflection, and reform.

This year, participants will choose **at least but not limited to ONE** of three, and respond to **at least but not limited to ONE** of the three prompts within it. Whether you're tracing the legacies of colonialism, designing pandemic equity frameworks, or exploring what neutrality means in an age of war and AI, our goal is to challenge your assumptions and sharpen your voice.

NEW 2025: What are TCs and WDs?

Starting in 2025, the TFF Policy Hackathon introduces two structural changes designed to better reflect the complexity of the world we're trying to understand and improve.

Topic Clusters (TCs) replace the old model of a single theme. Instead of one overarching topic, we now organize the competition around three broad issue areas. These are not narrow policy domains—they are cross-cutting, multidimensional challenges. Participants are encouraged to choose the cluster(s) that speaks to them.

But what we ask participants to do within those clusters has also evolved. That's where **Writing Dimensions (WDs)** come in.

Rather than assuming that every problem demands the same mode of response, we now offer three distinct approaches to writing — each rooted in a different way of knowing, and each designed to push you beyond a single framework.

The Mirror—Write to Reflect invites philosophical and moral interrogation. What's at stake? Who has been excluded? What contradictions do we live with, and what does justice actually require in principle?

The Compass—Write to Design asks you to step into the role of institutional designer. What new rules, mechanisms, or policies could meaningfully shift outcomes? How can we balance idealism with feasibility and trade-offs? **If you are looking for references, The Compass is the Dimension most closely related to the style of last year's single-dimension prompts.**

The Voice—*Write to Reveal* is a **truly novel one** this year. It offers space for creative nonfiction—grounded, human, and emotionally intelligent. Through first-person narrative or closely observed storytelling, this dimension asks: how do people actually live these dilemmas, and what truths emerge only when we listen closely?

We recommend both ways when thinking about the structure this year: you may either pick a TC first and then pick a dimension to write on, or vice versa.

There is no such thing as a more superior topic or dimension, whatever that fits you are the best ones.

Let the form follow the truth you want to reveal.

NEW 2025: The 1st TFF Youth Forum

Ideas do not emerge in a vacuum. Behind every policy challenge lie layers of history, competing interests, and unanswered ethical questions. That's why this year's Policy Hackathon is accompanied by a new program: the **1st TFF Youth Forum**, to be held from **August 6 to 7**.

The Forum is designed as an intellectual companion to the writing competition. Over two days, participants will hear from a series of curated panels—each one organized by a **Cluster Chief** corresponding to one of the three Topic Clusters.

Each Cluster Chief will bring together practitioners, researchers, or advocates with direct insight into the cluster's theme. These panels are meant to explore tensions, pose difficult questions, and model the kind of thinking we hope to see in submissions.

The Forum also includes live Q&A segments, where participants can raise questions related to their writing process, challenge expert perspectives, or seek clarity on the broader context behind a prompt. Whether you're preparing to write or refining your argument, these conversations are meant to sharpen your thinking.

Attendance is free and open to all. We would especially encourage Hackathon contestants and those who are interested in contesting to join.

Full panel schedules and speaker information will be released in late July through TFF's official channels.

Awards

To recognize clarity of thought, depth of analysis, and originality of vision, the TFF Policy Hackathon 2025 will continue to offer a set of monetary prizes for outstanding submissions.

This year marks a significant shift in the structure of the competition. With the move from a single-theme model to a multidimensional framework — featuring **four Topic Clusters** and **three Writing Dimensions** — we have intentionally expanded the competition’s intellectual scope. However, this horizontal expansion also requires a corresponding adjustment in the vertical evaluation structure.

Therefore, we have opted not to maintain last year’s \$400–\$200–\$100 tiered prize model. Instead, we are prioritizing **breadth of recognition across clusters**, while still preserving the spirit of excellence through an elevated global award.

\$600 will be evenly distributed across the four Topic Clusters. Each cluster will award one **Outstanding Award** of **\$150** to the most compelling submission within that category.

Among the four Outstanding Award recipients, one will be selected for the **Global Champion Award**, which includes an **additional \$50** (for a total of **\$200**).

Summary Chart

Award Title	Assigned To	Amount
Outstanding Award	SDGs Cluster	\$150
Outstanding Award	Small-State Neutrality Cluster	\$150
Outstanding Award	Healthcare Justice Cluster	\$150
Outstanding Award	PPMT Themed Special Cluster	\$150
Global Champion Award	One selected from the four above	+\$50 (Total \$200)

Topic Clusters & Prompts: Detailed Overview

Topic Cluster 1: Rethinking the SDGs

Cluster Chief: Weini Wang

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a roadmap for ending poverty, protecting the planet, and promoting peace, justice, and prosperity by 2030. The SDGs were never just technical benchmarks. They were meant to represent a shared moral vision of what a fair and sustainable future could look like—across borders, generations, and systems.

But in 2025—exactly one decade after their birth—that shared vision is facing unprecedented pressure. Inequality is widening. Climate action is stalling. Political polarization and global mistrust are undermining cooperation. At the same time, new challenges—such as AI, pandemics, and data colonialism—have emerged in ways that the SDGs never fully anticipated.

In this context, the SDGs no longer feel like a shared destination, but a set of contested promises. Why, then, should we still write about the SDGs?

Because when development stalls, people suffer. When justice is deferred, inequality deepens; because achieving the SDGs demands political will, moral clarity, and the courage to confront difficulties in moments of global crisis—elements we believe also demand outside, democratized input.

The Mirror—Write to Reflect

Title: Non-Self-Governing Territories: The Unfinished Work of Decolonisation

As of 2025, the United Nations still recognises 17 territories as “Non-Self-Governing Territories.” These include Western Sahara, New Caledonia, the Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Guam, and others—places that remain under colonial or quasi-colonial administration decades after the supposed end of global colonialism. While some of these territories have held referendums, questions persist about the fairness of the vote, political interference, or lack of recognition for independence movements.

Some states have historically championed independence, equality, and the right to self-determination. Yet when it comes to their own overseas territories, they often hesitate or evade the issue. Meanwhile, the fate of local populations has long been put on hold. This contradiction strikes at the core of SDG 16’s promise of just, inclusive institutions and SDG 10’s call for equality: many residents of these territories face restricted citizenship, limited political agency, or resource exploitation without full participation in governance.

The UN Charter affirms the right of peoples to self-determination and urges partnerships under SDG 17, but in practice, global institutions often defer to the sovereignty of powerful member states. As the hope for justice collides with the realities of geopolitics, the unfinished work of decolonisation demands a moral debate.

Prompt: What makes a claim to sovereignty legitimate, and can international law ever remain neutral? Consider how power, history, and institutions shape whose voices are recognised and whose are deferred.

The Compass—Write to Design

Title: Data Colonialism and the Global AI Divide

In November 2022, OpenAI's release of the ChatGPT model marked a new wave of technological innovation, sparking a global race in artificial intelligence. The age of a new digital divide is now on to fracture the world between nations with the computing power for building cutting-edge AI systems and those without.

Only 32 countries, or about 16% of all countries in the world, have these large AI computing hubs filled with microchips and computers, giving them what is known in industry parlance as “compute power.” In contrast, more than 150 countries have none. With ownership concentrated among a few tech giants, the effects of the gap between those with such computing power and those without it are already playing out.

This “AI divide” is not just technological—it is structural, geopolitical, and deeply unequal. It challenges SDG 9's promise of resilient infrastructure, SDG 10's commitment to reducing global inequalities, and SDG 16's vision of inclusive institutions that serve all. Without access to computing power, countries cannot build locally relevant models in their own languages or cultural contexts. Without regulation, they cannot control the systems that govern their courts, schools, and economies. And without multilateral intervention, they risk becoming permanent digital dependents. It is time for us to use innovation not only to advance AI technology, but to build smarter, more inclusive regulatory frameworks that keep pace with it.

Prompt: Design an international AI regulatory framework that addresses the concerns of Global South nations over data colonialism. Who should lead? What values must guide its creation? What trade-offs must be acknowledged?

The Voice—Write to Reveal

Title: Sinking Homes, Silent Warnings

Sea-level rise (SLR) is a multidimensional crisis that has been accelerating at more than twice the previous rate in the new century. It threatens SDG 3's vision of healthy lives, SDG 6's promise of clean water, SDG 11's call for resilient communities, and the central message of SDG 13: climate action rooted in justice. Among all coastal nations, Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly vulnerable due to their unique geographical endowments and their inextricable cultural and economic connection to the sea. Though

they contribute almost nothing to global emissions, they are among the first to suffer the consequences.

The shadow of unwelcome changes is etched into the very bones of sacred islands amidst the vast expanse of the South Pacific: increasingly unbearable heat, the surge in waterborne diseases, retreating coastline, and dying coral reefs. “The sea is eating all the sands”, some express their fear over the shrinking landmass, while others bluntly point out, “I’m not sure whether the islands are going to survive the next 12 years.”

Such quotes are not random lines from a fiction writer; they are the pressing realities in the country of Tuvalu, with an average elevation of less than two meters, rising tides now swallow streets and homes—ymidking the capital Funafuti by 2050. Everyday scenes are becoming unfamiliar: children who once played by the shore now learn that their playground may soon be underwater.

What’s most disheartening is that the human stories—the grief, dignity, and defiance of those risking losing their homelands—are too often unheard.

Prompt: Share a voice from a SIDS community confronting the slow loss of land to rising seas. You may write as a witness, a descendant, or a displaced resident—but ground your narrative in real places and lived realities. How does a community preserve dignity, memory, and meaning when home is vanishing?

Topic Cluster 2: The Small State Dilemma—between Giants

Cluster Chief: Eric Deng

In an increasingly polarised world, where geopolitical tensions flare between global giants and ideologies harden into rival blocs, the position of small states has never been more precarious. By “small states,” we refer to nations that, while sovereign, lack the economic scale, military reach, or global influence of major powers. In addition, these states—ranging from resource-dependent island nations to trade-reliant service economies—are often exposed to a high degree of economic openness, reliant on strategic imports (particularly food, energy, and industrial supplies), and susceptible to external shocks.

Lacking the heft to shape global outcomes, small states—which make up nearly two-thirds of UN members—have to approach international crises with extraordinary care. Yet in this age of great-power rivalry, the question arises: can a small state ever truly afford to be neutral?

Neutrality, in the context of international relations, originally referred to a state's military non-alignment, such as abstaining from war or joining military alliances. Over time, however, it has evolved into a more complex and multifaceted strategy, extending into economic, diplomatic, and even moral realms, such as neutrality in trade wars, sanctions, or ideological conflicts.

Global developments, from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to U.S. U.S.-China decoupling, have tested the boundaries of neutrality. For small states, neutrality can be double-edged: it protects sovereignty but may constrain action when values and interests collide. Can small states afford to take principled stances without endangering their national security? Or must neutrality sometimes give way to ethical responsibility or economic pragmatism?

The Mirror—Write to Reflect

Title: When Does Neutrality Become Complicity?

In recent years, small states have walked a careful line on global conflicts. Many small states, such as Switzerland, have imposed sanctions on Russia over its invasion of Ukraine, citing a clear violation of international norms. Yet, on other regional issues, small states have remained neutral in spite of mounting humanitarian concerns. For instance, Singapore has not extended similar actions toward Myanmar's military regime, despite ongoing violence and civilian suffering.

This selective action raises a profound ethical dilemma: When does strategic neutrality cross the line into moral failure? For small states, consistency and neutrality in foreign policy are often vital for survival in a volatile world. Yet this neutrality, however pragmatic, carries the risk of appearing indifferent, or worse, complicit.

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing". In the face of injustice, neutrality is not merely a passive stance; it becomes an active decision. In a time when silence may speak louder than words, small states must grapple with hard questions about values, responsibility, and realpolitik. What are the ethical limits of neutrality? Is selective action a necessity for small states, or a convenient way to sidestep responsibility?

Prompt: To what extent should small states uphold moral consistency in foreign policy, and what are the ethical limits of neutrality in the face of human suffering?

The Compass—Write to Design

Title: Designing Economic Neutrality in a Divided World

The global economy is fragmenting. Trade wars, sanctions, and technological decoupling between major powers like the U.S. and China are creating a world where economic choices are no longer neutral. In this environment, small countries walk a tightrope trying to protect and safeguard their own economic security without becoming pawns in larger power struggles. The risk of being economically coerced, targeted or excluded from critical supply chains is real and growing.

Traditional multilateral frameworks—once the backbone of small-state economic strategy—are faltering. WTO dispute mechanisms, regional trade blocs, and bilateral free trade agreements were designed for a more cooperative world. But when powerful nations disregard rules or wield economic tools coercively, smaller states are left exposed, with limited recourse.

Some nations respond by diversifying trade and investment partners, while others invest in technological self-reliance or foster regional security and supply chain alliances. For instance, Singapore maintains a carefully calibrated engagement with both Washington and Beijing while spearheading digital trade initiatives across ASEAN. But such strategies are not one-size-fits-all.

There is, therefore, a pressing need for innovative strategies that promote both the sovereignty of small states and their long-term prosperity. Neutrality in economic policy is not just about staying out of disputes, but also building systems that can absorb economic shocks.

Prompt: Design a policy framework that helps small countries preserve economic neutrality while strengthening their resilience to external pressures in trade, finance, or technology. What tools, institutions, and partnerships would your approach rely on?

The Voice—Write to Reveal

Title: A Quiet Country in a Loud World

From classrooms to boardrooms, from ports to parliaments, living in a small, neutral country often feels like existing in the eye of a geopolitical storm, calm but surrounded by noise. Policies made in Washington, Beijing, Moscow, or Brussels ripple into everyday life: supply chains shift, prices rise, media narratives harden, and public conversations become cautious, shaped by the quiet awareness that “taking a side” could come with consequences, direct or subtle.

For instance, in Switzerland—a country long celebrated for its neutrality—students have found themselves caught between moral conviction and institutional restraint. Take the recent University of Lausanne Palestine solidarity sit-in in May 2024: students occupied a campus building to protest the Gaza conflict, yet university leadership insisted on maintaining a neutral campus environment. Those young participants, compelled by empathy, faced official limits on their expression and were told their activism risked being “political,” despite widespread concern for human suffering.

Indeed, neutrality could become lived experiences. For some, it is comforting stability; yet for others, it is a source of quiet unease. What happens when young people see global suffering and want to act—but are told “this is not our fight?” How do businesses navigate deals when one client is under sanctions? How does one remain apolitical in a world that demands moral clarity?

Prompt: Write a reflective or narrative piece that captures what it means to live in a small country trying to stay neutral amid global conflict. How is neutrality experienced, questioned, or quietly lived through the eyes of an individual or community?

Topic Cluster 3: Healthcare Justice amid Global Inequity

Cluster Chief: Christy Wu

In theory, healthcare is often considered a universal good central to human dignity. Even to argue from a political dictator's purely pragmatic perspective, healthcare is still central to social stability, economic development, and thereby performance legitimacy and so on. It seems either way that providing adequate healthcare and relevant mechanisms to safeguard it would be a basic task for modern day governments, regardless of the regime types and even levels of economic development.

But here, the term healthcare justice refers not just to how care is delivered (which, in some cases, is not even a condition satisfied), but to how it is valued, structured, and rationed. It encompasses a wide series of questions concerning affordability, equity, and ethics. The discussions around it that caught our eyes is, correspondingly, a global and overreaching one, touching everything from privatized hospitals in the United States, to underfunded public clinics in the Global South, and even to vaccine inequality during global pandemics.

In 2025, the stakes have only grown sharper with recent events. From ongoing Medicaid cuts in the U.S. to rural misdiagnoses in China, from overburdened NGO clinics to pharmaceutical lobbying, the system is fraying at its edges.

Just like the case of any other cluster, the issues behind demand thoughts of a moral what and why, a practical how, and a human-based narrative that goes into the heart of many.

The Mirror—Write to Reflect

Title: Moral Dilemmas of Commodified Healthcare

When a healthcare system is privatized, medicine's fundamental mission—to heal—is forced to coexist with the only rational economic imperative: profit. In the United States, where private insurance and out-of-pocket payments comprise over half of total health expenditures, this contradiction is acute. Following the just-happened 2025 Medicaid cuts, which is estimated to strip coverage from up to 12 million people, hospitals across the United States are reporting closures, layoffs, and degraded services. For patients, the stakes are visceral: care delayed, denied, and eventually might be priced out of reach. In San Francisco, thousands of low-income residents face new bureaucratic hurdles, including work requirements and biannual re-certifications. For them and many, these translate to lost coverage and longer ER wait times, especially for seniors relying on Medicaid for long-term care.

The pattern is not unique to the U.S. In India, a dominant private healthcare sector has left rural regions severely underserved. Marxist theory critiques these shifts, which are essentially transforming public goods into private revenue streams, as forms of accumulation by dispossession. It seems to a lot that the ethical implications are stark. When profit governs access, how can society honor the oath to “do no harm”? What does justice look like in a system where healing has a price?

Prompt: “Health care should be a human right and not a commodity for sale.”

— Jim Wallis

When the vitality of human bodies becomes entirely subject to market allocation, does the profit imperative inherently corrupt medicine's oath to 'do no harm'? Through what moral lens—be it the impartiality of Rawls' veil of ignorance, the compassion central to virtue ethics, the dignity grounded in human rights, or anything else that is at the top of your mind—should we judge the legitimacy of healthcare privatization?

The Compass—Write to Design

Title: Inequities During Pandemics

Pandemics do not strike evenly—they follow the contours of existing social and structural inequality. In the 1918 flu, African Americans in Baltimore were thought to suffer lower mortality, not because of immunity, but because systemic segregation kept them isolated from the earliest waves.

A century later, COVID-19 reproduced similar patterns. Minority and low-income communities faced higher infection rates, poorer outcomes, and greater mortality. Essential workers—often without paid leave or remote options—bore the risk so others could stay home. Meanwhile, official guidelines often presumed resources most vulnerable populations lacked: stable housing, substantial savings, internet access, or sometimes even English proficiency.

Health policy that aims only at the “average” will almost always miss the margins. But the margins are where the crisis hits hardest. Rawls' veil of ignorance calls for designing systems as if we did not know our own status—an imperative especially urgent in pandemic planning. How might we structure healthcare response with those most at risk in mind from the beginning, not as an afterthought? What would an equitable crisis framework actually look like?

Prompt: “Health care must be recognized as a right, not a privilege.”

— Bernie Sanders

Looking across historical periods Emerging Infectious Diseases (EIDs) with pandemic potential, what are the exemplar mechanisms that ensured maximum equal access to basic health, education and economic needs with initiatives tailoring needs of the disenfranchised groups? Design a policy that ensures equity during pandemics based on your answer.

The Voice—Write to Reveal

Title: Voices Behind Unjust Healthcare Systems

Behind every statistic lies a human cost.

Xiao Rui, a girl from rural Yunnan, spent years misdiagnosed with cerebral palsy—until a team of university researchers offered free genetic testing and found a rare neurological disorder. By then, her family had already spent hundreds of thousands of yuan and sold land to fund her care. In Brazil, a community health worker quietly records COVID deaths in a favela ledger that no government will acknowledge. In Ukraine, a midwife delivers babies underground as missiles strike maternity hospitals above. These are not footnotes. They are the center of the stories

Such scenes are reminders of what systems overlook. From refugee camps to rural clinics, patients are reduced to claims denied or cases closed. However, the sensory truths—an empty syringe, the metallic sting of disinfectant, the silence after a bureaucrat's refusal—carry more moral weight than charts or white papers for those affected and their families. In healthcare, what is not said matters as much as what is. To write these moments is to bear witness—not just to suffering, but to its erasure.

Prompt: “Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health care is the most shocking and inhuman.”

— Martin Luther King

Narrate a visceral moment where healthcare systems muted sufferings into silence. Focus on sensory details—the weight of an empty insulin syringe, the smell of disinfectant masking fear, the sound of a bureaucrat's voice denying care. You may want to focus on how systems might erase personhood.

Topic Cluster 4: PPMT's 2025 Special—When the Law Gets it Wrong

Cluste Chief: Alex Wang

Each year, as the letter of the law translates its impact into the lives of the living, millions are stripped of their liberties and consigned to prisons. Most of these people, convicted and sentenced, are deserving of their punishments. But in these millions, not all are.

Of the millions of people incarcerated around the world, around 10% have been wrongfully convicted. They are those who have been tried, convicted, and sentenced for someone else's crime. And this is an issue equally pervasive in developed legal systems. In the United States, the number hovers around 5%. The West in general doesn't fare much better.

But what do we do? Would we rather have ten of the innocent in prison and one of the guilty on the streets, or ten of the guilty on the streets and one of the innocent in prison? Many different legal systems have attempted to address this in various ways. The West, for instance, embraces high standards of proof before a defendant can be convicted. On the other hand, more Eastern systems have traditionally imposed harsher punishments to keep the peace.

And this year, in collaboration with PPMT, China's National Mock Trial Association, we work together to put the law itself on trial. Alongside an expert committee of mock trial competitors comes the question of the impacts of a trial gone wrong itself. Because while wrongful convictions are merely a symptom of the imperfections of a legal system, their consequences are unconscionable for the innocent who are unjustly in prison. The scales of justice can be easily tipped either way. The only question remaining is how.

The Mirror—Write to Reflect

Title: Defending the Guilty

Defense attorneys are asked a question most have had to think deeply about: how do you defend someone you think is guilty? That question is, indeed, difficult. Ethically difficult. Some attorneys would say they won't. They would say they are engaging in an action irreconcilable with morals, a defense that brings an injustice upon the law that demands a conviction.

Others would disagree. It is not their job, they would say, to decide who is guilty and who is not: it is the jury in a court of law. But what is shared among those who adhere to either camp is that the unease is ever present. Most famous of these examples is the OJ Simpson trial, where despite his eventual acquittal, many of his own lawyers would reveal they had always believed Simpson to be guilty—but it would also be them who would be overcome with guilt. And the law, for better or for worse, does not provide a clear course of action.

Prompt: It is said that Lady Justice is blind. If so, should an attorney ever defend someone they believe to be guilty, even if winning means letting them go free?

The Compass—Write to Design

Title: Prevention of Wrongful Convictions

The foundation of most Western legal systems is captured in Blackstone's ratio: it is better to let ten guilty go free than to suffer one innocent. But, despite this, many countries around the world, whether they adopt Blackstone's formulation or not, still too often get it wrong.

The dangers of getting it wrong are severe—sometimes, they are irreversible. Many famous cases litter our recent history. Yusef Salaam, one of the infamous Central Park Five, was convicted in 1989 of brutally beating and raping a woman jogging in the park. For years he spent his youth in prison, his life washing away with time, until it would be revealed that he was coerced into confession. After his exoneration in 2023, years after his release, he would be elected as a councilmember in New York City.

But not everyone is so lucky. George Stinney Jr., at the tender age of 14, was executed for a crime he never committed. Vincent Simmons, convicted in a trial marred by misconduct, would spend 44 years in prison for someone else's crime. Clearly there are necessary measures to take to more robustly protect the innocent from the law. Clearly it is necessary to bring justice upon the guilty who are let free. But how a system ought to protect the innocent while convicting the guilty is an answer far from clear.

Prompt: Sir William Blackstone argued that it is better to let ten guilty go free than to suffer one innocent. Propose a policy framework for a country's legal system that can lower wrongful convictions. How can it be done, and through what institutions or reforms?

The Voice—Write to Reveal

Title: Feelings Matters

Some things are impossible to tell through numbers. The pain, anguish, and suffering of watching your life wash away in a prison cell, of being wronged for someone else's actions, is not capturable in statistics. But maybe stories can. Maybe they can convey what is otherwise unconveyable, even when we get it wrong.

Because as infallible as we wish we are, wrongful convictions usually arise from the mistake of a single person: faulty eyewitness testimony, misconduct by a detective, or a slip-up on the stand. And it is in these indescribable experiences, of when the law fails to protect the innocent, that the innocent must grope for the only option left—protecting themselves from the law.

Prompt: Write a narrative piece that captures the experience of a wrongful conviction. It can be told through the eyes of the convicted, their families, a convicting juror, etc. How is the toll of the law getting it wrong experienced?

Submission Guidelines

- **Format:** 1–4 page English-language paper
- **Font:** Times New Roman, 12pt, 1.5 spacing
- **Deadline:** *11:59 PM, September 30, 2025 (GMT+8)*
- **Submit to:** hackathon@forbiddenflourish.com
- **File Name:** “LastnameFirstname_TopicCluster#_WritingDimension#” (e.g., ZhangWei_TC2_WD1. ***The Mirror is always WD1, with the Compass being WD2 and the Voice being WD3**)

Frequent Questions and Answers

Who is eligible to participate?

Anyone between the ages of 14 and 24, regardless of nationality or background. You don't need to have previous experience in policy or professional writing.

What language should I use?

All entries must be written in English. This ensures fairness and accessibility across our judging team and international audience.

Do I need to choose a specific format or tone?

Yes. While style will vary across WDs, all entries must engage seriously with their TC and WD. We are not looking for casual opinion pieces or ungrounded reflections. The Mirror, The Compass, and The Voice each carry their own expectations, which are outlined in our guides and rubrics.

Can I work with a partner?

No. All entries must be submitted individually. However, you are welcome to discuss ideas with others.

What is the expected length and formatting?

Submissions should be between 1 and 4 pages, using Times New Roman, 12-point font, and 1.5 line spacing. There is no strict word limit, but clarity and structure are key.

How will submissions be evaluated?

Entries will be judged based on feasibility, problem identification, structure, evidence use, tone, and alignment with the chosen dimension. A detailed rubric is available in the attachment.

What happens after I submit?

Submissions will be reviewed by our editorial and judging teams. Selected finalists may be featured on our platform, invited to showcase their work, or offered mentoring and publication opportunities (Subject to Further Arrangements).

Will there be support during the writing process?

Yes. Throughout the competition period, we will release detailed guides and hold live Q&A sessions to support your process. The TFF Youth Forum 2025 will also be held in junction to facilitate our contestants. For inquiries, email us at hackathon@forbiddenflourish.com or follow our official TFF account/official website for updates.

Attachment: Detailed Rubrics

Detailed Rubric: The Mirror—*Write to Reflect*

Criteria	D (0)	C (1)	B (2)	A (3)
Philosophical Clarity	The piece fails to engage with any clear moral, ethical, or conceptual framework.	An attempt is made to engage with ethical questions, but the moral reasoning is vague or poorly developed.	Engages with a clear normative question and provides basic reasoning, though lacking nuance.	Articulates a compelling and well-defined moral question, showing command of ethical theory or normative thought.
Conceptual Rigor	Misuses or misunderstands key concepts (e.g. justice, neutrality, sovereignty).	Concepts are introduced but not well defined or consistently used.	Concepts are defined and used with general consistency, though some ambiguity remains.	Concepts are used with precision and depth; important distinctions are made and explored.
Argument Structure	The argument is incoherent or circular, lacking a discernible line of thought.	A structure is attempted but lacks logical development or internal consistency.	Argument is generally clear and progresses logically, though with some jumps or weak transitions.	Argument is tightly constructed, with a clear progression and internal coherence.
Moral Complexity	Treats the issue as black-and-white, ignoring counterarguments or ambiguity.	Acknowledges some complexity but oversimplifies important trade-offs or dilemmas.	Demonstrates awareness of multiple perspectives and conflicting values, though some are underdeveloped.	Richly explores competing values, ethical tensions, and trade-offs; avoids reductive conclusions.
Contextual Awareness	Shows little awareness of relevant historical, political, or social contexts.	Mentions context but does not integrate it meaningfully into the analysis.	Uses some context to support the argument, though not always fluently or with analytical depth.	Integrates relevant context (e.g. legal history, geopolitical dynamics, social struggles) with analytical relevance.

Use of Evidence	No evidence is provided to support claims.	Uses some evidence, but it is sparse, weak, or disconnected from the core argument.	Uses relevant and mostly credible evidence to support claims.	Employs strong, diverse, and well-integrated evidence to support normative claims.
Interpretation of Evidence	Evidence is quoted or cited without analysis.	Evidence is mentioned but weakly analyzed or disconnected from philosophical inquiry.	Evidence is interpreted with some insight, though analysis remains surface-level.	Evidence is analyzed critically, interpreted in ways that deepen the normative or conceptual discussion.
Originality	Relies heavily on clichés or borrowed reasoning with no original insight.	Shows some original phrasing or insight but remains derivative in core ideas.	Offers a few original insights, reframing standard arguments or asking new questions.	Brings distinctive perspective or framing that deepens the discourse in a novel or memorable way.
Tone and Language	Casual, imprecise, or inappropriate for reflective academic writing.	Language is sometimes unclear or uneven in tone.	Language is mostly formal, readable, and respectful of the topic.	Language is precise, thoughtful, and well-suited to moral inquiry and reflective writing.

Citation	No sources cited; claims are unsupported.	Minimal or inconsistent citation; unclear sourcing.	Properly cites most non-original ideas; uses reliable sources.	All external sources are cited appropriately in APA; demonstrates scholarly responsibility.
Ethical Significance	The topic lacks ethical weight or relevance.	The ethical stakes are hinted at but not clearly developed.	The essay identifies why the issue matters morally but doesn't fully draw out its urgency or implications.	The essay powerfully conveys why the issue matters and provokes serious moral reflection from the reader.

Detailed Rubric: The Compass—Write to Design

Criteria	D (0)	C (1)	B (2)	A (3)
Feasibility	The policy suggested is completely impossible to achieve.	The policy suggested is very difficult to achieve but still has some chances.	The policy suggested is feasible but demands significant resources and efforts.	The policy suggested is completely feasible and can be realistically implemented with currently available resources and efforts.
Identification of Criteria problem	The policy completely fails to identify the fundamental problem.	The issue is identified but not explained and dissected well.	The issue is identified and explained, but the explanation is not clear or well-rounded.	The issue is identified and explained in-depth. The explanation is comprehensive and clear.
Structure	The policy is poorly structured and the logic is hard to follow.	The policy has a general structure but it is often unclear.	The policy has a relatively clear structure but still has some logical errors.	The policy proposal is very clear, well-structured, and easy to follow.
Issue Addressed	The issue identified is not addressed at all. However, if the issue cannot be identified, then a grade of D should be directly granted.	The solutions provided in the policy proposal for the issue are vague and lack explanations.	The policy addresses the issue clearly and logically but lacks comprehensiveness.	The policy addresses mostly all potential issues, including the main problem and most of the side-effects. Some minor errors are allowed.
Use of Evidence	The author does not provide any evidence at all.	The author provides evidence to support some of the claims.	The author provides evidence for the majority of the claims.	The author provides supportive and compelling evidence for all claims.
Analysis of Evidence	The evidence cannot support the claims and has nothing to do with either the problems identified or the solutions.	The evidence provided does not have a strong logical connection with the claims in the argument.	The evidence provided has a strong logical connection with the claims in the argument but the analysis is not in-depth.	The evidence provided has a strong logical connection with the claims in the argument. The analysis is detailed and in-depth.

Cost-effectiveness of the Policy	The policy proposal has no cost-effectiveness analysis.	The policy proposal has some cost-effectiveness analysis but lacks comprehensiveness. For example, the policy only focuses on economic cost-effectiveness, which is not enough.	The policy has comprehensive cost-effectiveness analysis but the costs definitely outweigh the benefits.	The policy provides comprehensive cost-effectiveness analysis and the benefits outweigh the costs.
Citation	No citations are made; citations are not in APA style; only a few factual claims are backed by reliable sources with APA format.	Citations are made in APA style. All ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. About half of factual claims are backed by reliable sources with APA format.	Citations are made and in APA style. All ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. Large majority of factual claims are backed by reliable sources with APA format.	Citations are made and in APA style. All ideas that are not the author's are properly attributed. All factual claims are backed by reliable sources with APA format.
Expression (Wording, Grammar and Spelling)	The wordings are weird; there are many mistakes in grammar and spelling; the article is hard to read and understand.	The wordings are partially appropriate; there are some mistakes in grammar and spelling; the article is possible to read and understand but still unclear.	The wordings are appropriate and good; there are still a few mistakes in grammar and spelling; the article is readable and easy to understand, with minor errors.	The wordings are precise and concise; there are almost no mistakes in grammar and spelling; the article is readable and easy to understand, with no errors.
Tone	The tone is extremely casual and inappropriate for a policy proposal or academic writing.	The tone is too casual and inappropriate or it's in an op-ed style that's not suitable for academic writing.	The tone is generally formal and appropriate for academic writing. However, it still has some areas with an op-ed tone.	The tone is appropriate for academic writing or policy proposal, and it's consistent throughout the work.
Monitor and Evaluation Mechanisms of Policy	The proposal has neither monitor nor evaluation mechanisms for the policy.	The proposal has monitor or evaluation mechanisms for the policy. But the mechanisms are unachievable or ineffective.	The proposal has monitor or evaluation mechanisms for the policy. The author has a brief explanation for these systems or mechanisms.	The proposal has monitor or evaluation mechanisms for the policy. The author has an in-depth analysis for these systems or mechanisms.

Detailed Rubric: The Voice—*Write to Reveal*

Criteria	D (0)	C (1)	B (2)	A (3)
Narrative Depth	The writing is superficial and lacks emotional or thematic weight.	Some emotional depth is present, but the core story feels underdeveloped.	The narrative is reasonably compelling with some resonance.	The narrative is emotionally rich and thematically complex.
Voice and Perspective	The voice is indistinct or inconsistent; perspective lacks clarity.	A voice or perspective is present, but underdeveloped.	A clear voice or perspective is sustained throughout.	A distinct, authentic voice elevates the piece with layered perspective.
Sensory Detail	No sensory detail; abstract or generic language dominates.	Occasional use of sensory elements; not fully immersive.	Sensory details enrich many moments in the story.	Vivid sensory detail brings the narrative to life throughout.
Clarity of Context	The setting or real-world context is confusing or missing.	Some context is given, but remains vague or incomplete.	The context is generally clear and grounded in reality.	The piece is deeply anchored in specific, real-world context.
Relevance to Prompt	Fails to engage with the core prompt or theme.	Loosely touches on the prompt without clarity.	Responds directly to the prompt with moderate insight.	Fully addresses the prompt with strong thematic resonance.
Fact-Based Grounding	Entirely fictional, speculative, or factually unmoored.	Loosely based on real events but lacks verification or grounding.	Based on real facts or conditions with visible effort to stay accurate.	Creatively anchored in fact, with transparent and ethical use of truth.
Structural Coherence	The narrative is disjointed and difficult to follow.	Structure is uneven or confusing in places.	Generally coherent narrative arc.	Seamless, compelling structure that enhances meaning.
Language and Style	Language is flat or overly casual, with frequent errors.	Some stylistic awareness, but inconsistent or imprecise.	Effective and appropriate language with minor issues.	Lyrical, powerful, and precise use of language throughout.
Moral or Human Insight	Offers no discernible reflection on justice, suffering, or dignity.	Raises implicit themes, but lacks clarity or impact.	Offers thoughtful reflection on human stakes.	Provides piercing moral or emotional insight into injustice.
Citation /	No attempt to	Partial or vague effort	Acknowledges factual	Transparently

Attribution	distinguish fiction from fact; lacks ethical clarity.	to note factual basis.	basis or real-world origin.	credits real events, people, or data where applicable.
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