2026-2027 National Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow
Critique & Contest Rules
Entry Period: November 1, 2026, through May 15, 2027
Entries must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Central 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.

2. The entry fee is $3 per individual entry. Magazine entries are $10 USD per entry. The National ACT organization will invoice each chapter for the number of judged entries.

3. **All entry fees and/or dues must be received by the National ACT Executive Treasurer by June 30, 2027, for an entry to remain eligible. If payment is not received, the entry will be disqualified.**

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.

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

8. All entries must be created between May 16, 2026, and May 15, 2027.

9. 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.

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

11. 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.

12. National ACT reserves the right to combine categories if a single category receives fewer than five entries.

13. 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.

14. 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 will be distributed to the entry submitter and the ACT chapter adviser.

15. 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.

SWEEPSTAKES AWARDS

1. Each accepted entry will earn the submitter points in the Critique and Contest Sweepstakes Awards.

2. Entries will be evaluated using a ranked point system. Rankings will be converted to points based on the total number of eligible entries in the award category. First place will receive points equal to the total number of entries, second place will receive one fewer point, and each subsequent rank will receive one fewer point until the final-ranked entry receives one point. Ties will be adjusted as needed.

3. Awards will be given to the 1st-, 2nd-, and 3rd-place individuals.

4. In the event of a tie, the individual receiving the greatest number of first-place rankings across all award categories shall be declared the winner.

RECOGNITION

- Awards will be presented during the National ACT business meeting at 2027 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.
- Each sweepstakes award winner 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	Short Video Production	Scenic	Magazine Page Layout	Public Relations Campaign
Short Feature	Magazine	Long Video Production	People	Single Page Design	Risk/Crisis Communications Plan
Long Feature		Audio Package	Animal	Logo	Social Media Campaign
Short Personality Profile			Plant	Print Advertisement	"Wild Card"
Long Personality Profile			Food	Web Design	
News/Press Release			Other		
			Black and White		
			Photo Series		

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.**

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. **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.

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. The PDF may be divided into two files, if necessary, to stay within file size requirements.
   2. Mailed Submission – Five 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 $10 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 8). Up to two issues may be submitted by a chapter.

   All mailed entries **must be postmarked no later than May 15, 2027,** to allow adequate time for

distribution to judges.

Magazine category entries should be mailed to:
Shelly Legg
National ACT Executive Treasurer
6413 N. Sangre Rd
Stillwater, OK 74075

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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.**

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. **SHORT VIDEO PRODUCTION**
   Any type of video production, including but not limited to advertisements, PSAs, news segments, and reels, is eligible for this category. Entries must be less than 2 minutes in duration.

2. **LONG VIDEO PRODUCTION**
   Any type of video production, including but not limited to documentaries, event coverage, tutorials, interviews, and news packages, is eligible for this category. Entries must be more than 2 minutes in duration.

3. **AUDIO PACKAGE**
   Newscasts, PSAs, podcasts, interviews, documentaries, advertisements, or editorials are eligible for this category. Entries must be more than a market report.

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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.

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.

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DESIGN AND LAYOUT DIVISION

The entries for magazine page layout, single page design, logo, and advertisement are submitted online as a PDF. The web design entries are submitted as URL addresses.

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. **MAGAZINE PAGE LAYOUT**
   Entries can include single- or multi-page publication spreads.

2. **SINGLE PAGE DESIGN**
   Entries should be a single-page publication that promotes an event/cause or shares information with

an audience. Examples include posters, flyers, infographics, or similar publications/designs. These designs cannot be advertisements.

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

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

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

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PUBLIC RELATIONS DIVISION

The entries for public relations campaign, risk/crisis communication plan, and social media campaign are submitted as PDF files. Please submit a pdf file or a .jpg photo of a "wild card" entry. For example, either a pdf of the design OR a photo of a printed T-shirt could be submitted for a T-shirt design.

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. **"WILD CARD"**

Submit one standalone communications item that does not fit within any of the other categories described above. This category is intended for unique, individual communications pieces designed to inform, promote, brand, engage, or communicate a message but do not appropriately fit within other categories. Entries may include photos of completed physical items, design mockups, or other electronic representations. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Promotional products, such as T-shirts, mugs, pens, buttons, stickers, magnets, or tote bags
- Displays, exhibit materials, trade-show displays, or specialty signage
- Branded event materials, invitations, tickets, badges, or similar items
- Packaging, labels, boxes, bags, or other branded packaging materials
- Installations or murals
- Vehicle graphics or decals
- Other unique physical or specialty communications materials that do not fit within an existing category

An entry may be submitted to this category only if it does not qualify for another category. The same communication item may NOT be entered in multiple categories. National ACT reserves the right to create a new category if five or more entries featuring the same type of communication item are submitted in this category.

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