

## Guidance: The Gould Prize 2026

This document is intended to offer guidance on how to enter the Gould Prize, in addition to the formal rubric. The formal rubric is as follows:

**Candidates are invited each year to submit an essay of between 1,500 and 2,500 words in answer to a question from our list. The word count excludes footnotes and references. Any widely used referencing style is acceptable as long as you use it consistently.**

**Candidates must write their essays entirely on their own: that is, without help from their school or from artificial intelligence. Your essay should represent your most ambitious, original, and imaginative *critical* work. We are not looking for submissions in creative writing. We also expect a close engagement with the prompt. Essays can be written on all works of literature composed originally in the English language, from anywhere in the world. Also eligible are all works of literature originally written in the British Isles in any other language (e.g. Welsh, Scottish Gaelic, Scots, Irish, French, Latin, Greek, etc). Excluded are works from beyond the British Isles that were not originally written in English (e.g. Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*).**

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Within these parameters, a wide variety of approaches could be successful in the prize. Often, successful candidates range widely in their intellectual interests and modes of analysis. Nonetheless, the adjudicators draw candidates' attention to the following points to help guide their thinking:

### **Prose Style:**

The adjudicators will be interested in how well you express yourself. Clarity of expression is more important than academic jargon. A sense of personal style may also be rewarded.

### **Textual Analysis:**

The adjudicators place great importance on how well you engage with the text(s) you are analysing. Are you attentive to textual details, curious about elements in the text? Candidates often succeed when they connect local, intricate elements of a text with larger and deeper readings of the text as a whole. To this end, quoting directly from the text and analysing those quotations closely will usually be essential.

### **Structure of Argument:**

The adjudicators will be interested in how you use textual analysis to develop a coherent argument. Candidates will be rewarded for a clear argumentative voice, displaying a continuity of thought through the essay.

### **Presentation:**

The presentation and formatting of writing always affect a reader's reception of it. Aim for your presentation to be consistent, neat, and for it not to be a distraction to your argument.

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### **What should I write about?**

There is no one answer to this question. Successful candidates have in the past compared a number of texts off the beaten path for school students. Others have chosen an author who interests them and compared a number of that author's texts. Others still have made comparisons across time periods, for instance studying the reception of a major author like Shakespeare in modern writing, or drawing comparisons between texts of the same genre in different historical periods. Often, comparison between texts can generate lively argumentation.

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### **How should I approach the question?**

Each question consists of a quotation from a literary or critical text, followed by a direction regarding on which issues to focus. Successful candidates often engage closely with both the quotation and respond clearly to the direction they are given. It can often be profitable to entertain a range of possible interpretations of the given quotation.