

Power of the Pen

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Power of the Pen?

PoP is an interscholastic creative writing competition that is unique to the state of Ohio. It was founded in the '80s to give creative writers an outlet and a competition where they could put their skills to the test against other writers. You can learn more about PoP at their website: <https://powerofthepen.wildapricot.org/>.

Are all middle school students eligible for the team?

Unfortunately not – PoP is only for 7th- and 8th-grade students.

How many writers make the team each year?

There will be 6 writers at the 7th-grade level and 6 writers at the 8th-grade level. In a typical year, almost *40 students* will try out for only 12 spots on the team. Only 1 in 4 students will make the team, so the cuts are ruthless. I wish I could take everyone, but it's not possible.

What days does the team practice?

Since the team only consists of 12 members (six 7th- and six 8th-graders) we choose practice days based on everyone's schedule after the team has been selected. By joining the team, students are committing to two practices per week all year long. Practices are only an hour long and run from 3:00-4:00 pm, so members need to attend each one (unless there is an emergency, of course). Practice days may be shifted as the year progresses to fit different school activities.

What happens at a Power of the Pen practice?

Several things happen at practice. I try to simulate tournament events as closely as possible, so the writers will get a prompt and they will have forty minutes to create their piece. Students hand in their prompts, and then I provide detailed feedback about their writing. We dissect our writing and the writings of famous authors in the hopes of weeding out the weaknesses and reinforcing the strengths. We will not always be writing prompts, however. Some days we read and write poetry to examine sentence structure and vocabulary. We often write to pictures, trying to add specific detail to our pieces. Sometimes we pair and share pieces so that students have a chance to comment on each other's writings.

How does the season work?

There are three events during the PoP tournament year – the **district** event, the **regional** event, and the **state finals**. Any student may write at the district event – there is no other qualification than desire. Students must *earn* their way to the regional and state events, though. After the district event, the top 50% of writers move on to the regional event. Only 20% of writers will move on from the regionals to the state final competition at Ashland University in May.

What happens at a tournament event?

At events, students will be given three different prompts to address. The prompts are one- or two-sentence phrases that serve as the basis for the writing. This is an example of a prompt from an event: *The Warning – Use this word as your central theme*. Once students receive the prompt, they have 40 minutes to write. Some prompts focus on story-telling, some focus on description, and some even deal with philosophical issues. The goal is to create a creative, interesting piece of writing. After the first prompt, there is a 10-minute switch/break period, and then it's on to the second prompt. Students write on a brand new prompt for 40 more minutes. There is one more break and then a third 40-minute prompt. After the writing is done, the students eat lunch and wait as the results are tabulated. The top writers at the tournament receive medals and trophies. The other writers will learn if they moved on in a couple of weeks.

What happens if we have to miss an event? (district, regional, or state)

This is the only absolute in the Power of the Pen season. *Events cannot be missed – period*. Before tryouts I send home an information packet with the three dates of our events for the year. If students cannot commit to *any of those three dates*, then they cannot be in Power of the Pen. It's that simple. Since there are so few events, students missing events costs our team dearly. We lose competition points and we are also charged a fee for "dropping" writers. The three event dates on the tryout schedule are mandatory.

How do I know if Power of the Pen is for me?

Power of the Pen has a long, long season – it goes from November or December until the end of May. Sometimes what seemed like a good idea at Thanksgiving loses its luster come April. So how do you know if PoP is for you? If you *love* to write – if you write stories and poems on your own just for fun, then this program is right up your alley. If you love reading and are so inspired by the authors that move you that you want to try your own hand at the craft, then this program is for you. If you love the idea of taking what you know about writing and strengthening those skills so that you can reach the next level, then this program is for you. If creative writing is your thing, then this program was designed for you!