Environmental Division 2026 Student Poster Contest Overview and Guidelines

Overview

At each SME Annual Conference, the Environmental Division (ED) holds a student poster session contest as a way to encourage and foster the next generation of Geologists, Geological Engineers, Environmental Engineers and Environmental Scientists, and to support the students' academic achievements. The ED welcomes both graduate and undergraduate participants from a diversity of universities. Students submit their abstracts via email, and then display their posters at the ED Luncheon held during the SME MINEXCHANGE Annual Conference & Expo. They explain their research in person to a panel of judges selected from industry, academia, and the ED leadership, who review the quality of abstracts, posters, and presentations to determine the winners.

Students have the opportunity to show off their work and a chance to put cash in their pockets to further their education. The first-place winner receives $2,000; the second-place $1,000; and the third-place $500. In addition, each poster submission receives a complimentary ticket to the ED Luncheon.

Beyond the monetary incentive is the invaluable chance to network. Held just before the ED luncheon for all SME members to attend, the poster presentations provide a platform for students to talk with professionals about their work. Business cards are often exchanged, providing students with a professional contact to provide some insights into their research as well as a point of contact with a company or organization that could be helpful when advancing their career.

2026 ED Student Poster Contest

The SME ED invites all interested students to participate in its Student Poster Contest in conjunction with the 2026 SME MINEXCHANGE Annual Conference & Expo in Salt Lake City, UT.

Participant Requirements

To participate in the ED Student Poster Contest, entrants must be:

- Currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at an accredited university
- A paid member of SME
- A paid registrant for the 2026 SME Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, UT and able to attend to present your poster

Contest Details:

- There will be two levels of judging: graduate students and undergraduate students. However, consideration will be given to experience and level of education in regard to the subject matter.
- Two phases of judging will occur: abstracts and poster presentations.
- Prizes for each level: $2,000 for 1st; $1,000 for 2nd; and $500 for 3rd. Each poster submission will receive a complimentary ticket to the ED Luncheon on Tuesday, February 24, 2026. Luncheon tickets will be for the author only.

Contest Format:

- Participants will submit a 1-page abstract by December 15, 2025, to the ED Program Planning Chair at evd-poster@smenet.org.
- The ENV Division Program Planning Committee will notify participants by January 5, 2026, whether their abstract has been accepted.
- Poster presentations will be the morning of Tuesday, February 24, 2026. Each student will have 5 minutes to explain their research to a panel of judges, followed by Q&A with the judges.
- Judging will focus on the quality of abstracts, posters, and presentation.
- Winners will be announced during the ED Luncheon.

To Qualify and Enter:

- To qualify, you must be:
    - Currently enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at an accredited university
    - A paid member of SME
    - A paid registrant for the 2026 SME Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, UT and able to attend to present your poster
- To enter, submit your 1-page abstract to evd-poster@smenet.org no later than **December 15, 2025**.
- All entries must be from individual students (i.e., co-authors may only be research advisors).

Timeline:

- December 15, 2025: Submit your 1-page abstract to evd-poster@smenet.org
- January 5, 2026: Participants will be notified that their abstract has been selected
- February 24, 2026: ED Poster Session at MINEXCHANGE 2026 in Salt Lake City, UT
    - *We recommend posters are prepared and approved by research sponsors/advisors by February 9.*
- Failure to follow the guidelines and due dates listed herein may result in ineligibility.

Formatting Requirements:

Abstract Format

- 1 page (including text and graphics); 8.5” x 11” paper size; 1” margins.
- You must submit as a PDF file; the file name should be in the form of “last name_first name_EDContest_2026.pdf”
- Send your PDF file to evd-poster@smenet.org.

Template Poster Format

- A poster size of 35” x 44” is recommended, but not required.
- Many helpful guides to poster design are available online.
- Directions for hanging your poster in the session area will be provided at a later date for those poster abstracts selected to participate.

Helpful Dos and Don’ts

- DO use at least 16-point size font for any text you mount. Most viewers will be at least three feet away from your poster, and smaller fonts will be difficult to see.
- DO NOT mount the text of your paper as the poster.
- DO NOT be absent from your scheduled poster time! The purpose of a poster session is to create additional opportunities for you to interact with your colleagues.

Points to consider when putting your poster together:

- Divide the contents of your poster into appropriate sections. For instance – title of paper, author, institutional affiliation, abstract, methodology, data, results, conclusions, etc.
- Use **larger than** 16-point font lettering for the poster’s title, author, and institutional affiliation.
- Avoid fonts that are script or difficult to read.
- If hand lettering is required, use a black felt-tip pen (i.e., Sharpie™).
- Be concise with your written material. Save elaborative points for discussion/interaction with viewers. For conclusions, focus on a central finding that lends itself to informal discussion.
- Use graphs, charts and/or tables (color if possible) to show results. Graphics help make your poster interesting.
- A neutral poster or matte board is more amenable to the eye than a brightly colored background. A splash of color here and there, perhaps highlighting central findings or exciting results, will make your poster “stand out” from the others.
- A mailing tube or portfolio case is recommended for transporting your poster.

Judging criteria (up to 30 points total possible):

- Abstract technical content – scored 0 to 7 points.
- Professionalism of abstract and alignment with these guidelines – scored 0 to 3 points.
- Poster appearance (organization, layout, alignment with these guidelines) – scored 0 to 10 points.

- Presenter's presentation of poster (speaking, ability to respond to questions) – scored 0 to 10 points.
- Presenters will each be allotted 5 minutes to explain their research to a panel of judges; scores will be reduced if time is exceeded.