What is BBC 500 Words?



500 Words is a story-writing competition for children aged 5–11 – and every child is welcome.

Up to 500 words – not a target!

Children can write an original story in **up to 500 words**, letting their creativity take the lead. An adult, such as a parent or guardian, needs to submit the story on the 500 Words website.

There are two age categories: **5 –7 years** and **8 –11 years**.

Key dates

Entries open:

8am Tuesday 29 September 2026

Entries close:

9pm Friday 6 November 2026

No perfect spelling, punctuation or grammar needed!

Spelling, punctuation and grammar aren't including in the marking criteria – our judges are looking for original ideas, imagination and storytelling.

In previous years, we've seen children surprise themselves by seeing their stories reach the Top 50 – could your child be next?

Why should my child take part?

- Because every child has a story to tell
- The competition is a chance for children to let their imaginations run wild, have fun with writing and see their ideas brought to life
- Their story could even be read by a celebrity on the BBC!

Both the 5 – 7 years and the 8 – 11 years age categories will have a bronze, silver and gold winner.

Prizes include National Book Tokens (Gold: £75, Silver: £50 and Bronze: £25), framed illustrations and a place in the 500 Words winners' book.

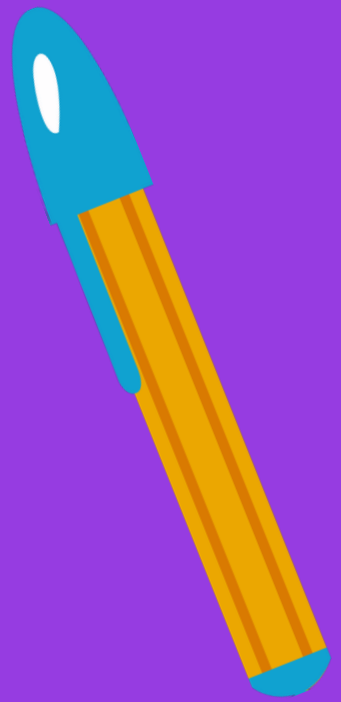
Gold winners will also win 500 books for their school library!

Ready to find out more? Explore 500 Words and the prizes on offer and see how your child can take part.

How can I get my child started?

500 Words is for every child

Whether your child loves writing stories, is just starting to find their confidence, or simply has a brilliant idea they want to bring to life, 500 Words is a chance for them to get creative and have fun with storytelling.



There's no need to worry about getting every word perfect.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar aren't marked by our judges. And 500 words is a maximum, not a target - shorter stories are welcome too.

All they need is an idea and a little imagination.

500 Words gives children the opportunity to enjoy writing, express their ideas and share a story they can be proud of.

Need a little help getting started?

There are story starters, videos and other resources available at bbc.co.uk/500words to help spark ideas and support your child.

Explore our story starters for ages 5-7 and ages 8-11 and other resources

A checklist to submitting a story



1. Get creative
Your child writes a story of up to 500 words.

2. Entries open 8am Tuesday 29 September 2026

2. Submit it online
An adult – such as a parent, guardian or teacher – submits the story through the 500 Words website.

3. Get it in by 9pm on Friday 6 November 2026
We can't accept any entries that we receive after 9pm – even if it's due to technical difficulties – we recommend getting the entries in as soon as you can to avoid disappointment.

Does the story have to be typed?

Yes - the child can either write it on paper or type, but parents/guardians must type it up to submit and not change the story. We advise that you save a version in Word document / Notepad so you can easily copy and paste.

FAQS

Does the story have to be 500 words long?
No! 500 words is the maximum. There's no minimum.

Who submits the story?
An adult submits it online on behalf of the child. It can be a parent/guardian or a teacher at school.

Can my child enter more than one story?
No – each child can enter one story.

Can my child use AI?
No. Stories must be entirely the child's own work.

Who can enter?
Children aged 5–11, living in the UK, and they are the relevant age on 6 November 2026.



Ready to take part?
Head to the 500 Words website to find out more and enter.