Simple Steps Towards A Winning WFA Essay

What is the Woodie Flowers Award?

The Woodie Flowers Award celebrates effective communication in the art and science of engineering and design. Dr. William Murphy founded this prestigious award in 1996 to recognize mentors who lead, inspire and empower using excellent communication skills.

Two subcategories are awarded:

- The Woodie Flowers Finalist Award (WFFA) is presented to one adult mentor at each Regional Competition or Region/State Championship.
- The Woodie Flowers Award (WFA) is presented to one WFFA winner at the FIRST Championship

Eligibility

Each year, students may submit an essay nominating one mentor from their team to be considered for this award. FIRST will recognize one adult mentor at each regional or State/Region Championship to receive the WFFA. If a team already has a mentor who has received the WFFA in a prior year, then that team may re-submit that mentor in the current year in addition to nominating a mentor for the WFFA if they wish. The current year WFFA recipients, along with those mentors who received a WFFA in a prior year and have been re-nominated, will be judged to receive the WFA at the FRC Championship.

Spirit of the Award

High school students on a FIRST Robotics Competition team may nominate one (1) adult team member as their Woodie Flowers Finalist Award (WFFA) candidate. The students will describe how this mentor has given them the best understanding of the challenges, opportunities and satisfaction involved in the discipline of engineering and design. Professor Flowers will lead the past Championship Woodie Flowers Award (WFA) recipients as they judge and select the Finalists and the Championship recipient based on student essays.

This award recognizes an individual who has done an outstanding job of motivation through communication while also challenging the students to be clear and succinct in recognizing the value of communication. As such, it is very important that this be a student-led effort and a student decision. Team mentors should direct their students to the online entry site and let the high school students decide whom to nominate. Adults can help edit, but this must be a student-
led effort, since any team mentor is eligible. Authors must be **clearly** identified as high school students in the online submission.

Writing WFA nominations isn’t hard, but it certainly isn’t easy. We know that it’s difficult to say everything that you want to say in just a few measly words, and we know how much your nominee means to you. Here are some ideas on how to spice up your nomination, get all of your ideas out there, and let the WFA committee know what a great nominee you have. Remember the WFA committee is comprised of previous WFA winners. These people know what good characteristics define a mentor deserving of the WFA. After all they won it! Realize however that they most likely don’t know your mentor like you do. So you have to educate them.

**First: Brainstorm and Research – Everywhere!**

It seems silly to think that you need to do ‘research’ on your WFA nominee, but in reality, you want to provide the best information possible to the judging committees. As a student on the team, chances are that the person you are nominating may have been involved in FIRST before you showed up. Here is a checklist to help you though these first steps.

1. Talk to other people about your nomination.

   If your nominee is a mentor, ask other mentors some questions about the nominee. A teacher or other students might also have information. Even if you think you know a lot about the nominee, you’ll be surprised what you can find out from others.

   Don’t be afraid to include quotes from others in your nomination. It only goes to show the committee that you’re not the only one who feels strongly about this nominee. You also want to research your nominee a bit further. If you aren’t getting clear answers from teammates, you may want to talk to others that the nominee interacts with – coworkers, former students, even their spouse. Lots of people might have helpful information. See the three included questionnaire sheets below.

2. Research ChiefDelphi.

   You can find out if your nominee has a CD username by going to the Members section, and searching for their name. If nothing pops up, try doing an advanced search with your team number. This should give you all of the CD users that are associated with your team, and may help you to identify your nominee. If they do have a username, check out some of their former posts. You may find an inspirational quote from the nominee or a bit of advice they’ve given someone else. Feel free to quote these and put them in your essay.
3. Look at other winning essays.

For WFA, winning nomination essays are not provided to the public. However, you can review ChiefDelphi and find many winning WFA essays in the White Papers section. Another suggestion is to check out the recipient essays for WFA, and look at who nominated them. Unless the person who submitted the nomination chose to remain anonymous, their name should be listed at the bottom. You can message some of these individuals via Chief Delphi and see if they are willing to share their essays with you.

Second: Create an essay flow structure

It's not easy to just sit down and write. However, by now you should have a clear purpose in mind, and at least a few things to say about the nominee. Of course, make sure you follow the cardinal rule...

NEVER, never start writing in the actual submittal box for a nomination!

Even though you may be careful, you run the risk of accidentally submitting your first draft to the judging committees. They'll be looking for a refined, smooth-reading essay that's been proofread, and you will rarely (if ever) get that on the first try.

Instead, open up Notepad or Microsoft Word and start typing away. Always start with an outline, no matter how rough. It can be something as easy as this:

- John D. Public
  - Intro
  - Team Involvement
    - Teammates
  - FIRST Involvement
    - Regional
    - Company
  - Conclusion

Once you've got something down and have finished up your research, try fleshing out your outline even further. Figure out what material you have, what quotes you have, and work on extending it out to a point where you can start writing freely. It should look something like this:

- John D. Public
  - Intro to who John is
  - Team involvement
    - What my teammates had to say
 Qualities he exemplifies on our team
  • What he has taught us
    • What we have passed on to others
    • How this has affected us

• Overall FIRST involvement
  o Regional committee member
  o Volunteering for FIRST
    • Regional
    • Local FLL qualifiers
      • Brings in new FLL volunteers every year
  o Works for company that sponsors our team
    • Takes off work to do team activities
    • Helps to fight for team funding

• Conclusion
  • Why we think he deserves it
  • End quote

You don't need to start by writing your introduction, then your body, then your conclusion. Work with the information you've got. Don't worry about how long it is, or what you may need to cut out later. Just start writing, and keep writing until you've got everything down.

Third: Read It, Read It, Read It Out Loud

Once you've got what you think is the first draft written, the next step is to stand in front of the mirror and read it out loud. Make sure you have a pen or highlighter handy, and make a mark next to each sentence that causes you to stumble. Don't just scan over it and assume it is okay – actually read it out loud. Trust me, even the best writers out there make really dumb mistakes and catch it this way. Also, make sure you read it all the way through without stopping, except to make a mark. Otherwise, you'll get so hung up trying to fix little things that you may miss other problems.

(If you don't have a printer or are in a hurry, such as at a team meeting, just read it out loud at the computer. Use the highlighter tool to mark sentences that give you trouble, but again, don't stop reading until you've finished.)

Once you've read through and got your marks down, check the word count. The limit for WFA essays is 600 words, and UFH is the same. Generally speaking, for an award or contest of this sort, the goal is to get as close as you can to the limit. At this point in writing, you are probably well over the 600 word limit. Even if you aren't, it's time to start narrowing things down, smoothing out those places that give you problems, and really making your essay top quality. That means it's time for my favorite part…
Fourth: Play the Devil's Advocate

Okay, I guess if you aren’t familiar with grading papers, this can sound kind of scary and intimidating. You may have heard your English teacher talk about ‘drawing blood’ from a stack of homework. (It’s also been referred to as ‘axe murdering’… Eeeek!) Well, in his/her case, it’s probably a bad thing – it refers to getting out the dreaded red pen and leaving marks all over the papers. At the end of grading, some papers can look completely ‘cut up’ with lots of red showing, hence the ‘drawing blood’ remarks. In your case, drawing blood is actually a GOOD thing. No, really!

One of the most crucial parts of handing in a good paper, essay, or submission is to Play Devil’s Advocate first. Even if your pen isn’t red, the work that you do in the editing phase is what makes your essay come to life. You want as much blood from the paper as you can get (but don’t overdo it). Here’s a list of recommended things that you can do to refine your UFH essay:

- Add or remove commas as necessary
- Make sure you haven’t used the same word too many times or too close together
  - Find a similar key word on Thesaurus.com
  - Think of different ways to describe the same thing or quality
- Reread several times until you don’t have any more marks
- Make sure there are no run-on sentences
- Spell-check, spell-check, spell-check, even if you are a good writer!
- Find a creative and unique introduction/conclusion that isn’t too far off-topic or vague
- Avoid making lists of accomplishments or awards
- Don’t go crazy with specifics – just give enough information, not too much
- Watch your word count!

By now, you’ve got a paper full of red marks. Make your edits, write a second draft, and follow steps 3 & 4 again. That means you’re almost done, and it’s time to finish up.

Fifth: Let Someone Else Play Devil's Advocate, Too

After all, there’s no use in having all the fun yourself, right? Ask a friend, a fellow Chief Delphi user, a teammate, your parents, or a mentor to review the essay too. It’s short; it should only take a few minutes of their time.
At this point, you’ve been staring at the essay for quite a while. They might find different ways to word a sentence, find more stopping points or confusing sentences, and might be able to nit-pick your grammar. The more people that review the essay, the better off you’ll be. I recommend at least two proofreaders. This way, if someone’s unsure about one change, you can consult someone else and find out what they think.

Once this is finished, type up the changes you want to make, and send it in. There is a point where you can do too much to an essay, and you want to avoid that at all costs. If you feel happy with your essay, submit it and go on with your day. You did the best that you possibly could, and now it’s time for the judges to review your work.
Woodie Flowers Essay Fact Sheet  (To be responded to by candidate / please attach typed answers)

Candidate Name: ___________________  Date: ________________

1. How many years has the candidate been in FIRST? 
2. Has the candidate ever been involved with other teams? 
3. Does the candidate volunteer for FIRST outside of the team? 
4. What has the candidate done at other FIRST events or with other FIRST programs over the years? 
5. What does the candidate do or has the candidate done to grow the team? 
6. What does the candidate do or has the candidate done to promote FIRST in the community? 
7. What does the candidate feel they promote for an attitude and character amongst the students? 
8. Does the candidate have a motto or a goal that drives them? 
9. What has the candidate brought in terms of improvement, education, and inspiration to their current team? 
10. What sacrifices does the candidate make to improve team, the students on the team, and the people around the candidate? 
11. Does the candidate work to reach out to the local FIRST community and how? 
12. What does the candidate feel they have taught other students about communication and conduct as professionals? 
13. What do the candidate do at work to promote and support engineering and the improvement of their workplace and society.
Woodie Flowers Essay (Mentor) Interview Questionnaire
(To be responded to by candidate / please attach typed answers)

Candidate Name:________________________
Date:_______________________________

Interviewee Name:________________________

1. What do you feel the candidate brings to the team in terms of expertise, passion, excitement, education?
2. What type of culture do you feel the candidate promotes among the students?
3. What kind of leadership qualities does the candidate bring to the team?
4. How do you see the candidate exhibit a role model type of character and attitude?
5. How does the candidate inspire you as an individual or what do they inspire you to do or become?
6. In your opinion what does the candidate do or has the candidate done to improve the team and FIRST community?
7. What do you feel the candidate is trying to bring to the students on team?
8. What kind of attitude do you feel the candidate brings on a daily basis?
9. If you could sum up the candidate in a paragraph, what would it be?
Woodie Flowers Essay (Student) Interview Questionnaire

(To be responded to by candidate / please attach typed answers)

Candidate Name:________________________
Date:_______________________________

Interviewee Name:_____________________

1. How do you feel the candidate has impacted your life personally and as a student?
2. What type of culture do you feel the candidate promotes among the other students?
3. What kind of leadership qualities does the candidate bring to the team?
4. How do you see the candidate exhibit a role model type of character and attitude?
5. How does the candidate inspire you as an individual and what do they inspire you to do or become?
6. In your opinion what does the candidate do or has the candidate done to improve the team and FIRST community?
7. What aspects of the team does the candidate involve themselves in? Do they contribute in one area or many areas on the team?
8. How do you perceive the candidates impact to the team?
9. What kind of life qualities do you feel the candidate has brought to you?
10. How do you feel the candidate has impacted you professionally and how has the candidate impacted your future professional decisions if at all?
11. How well does the candidate communicate with you and with the team?
12. How has the candidate communicated and helped you improve your communication skills?
13. How does the candidate inspire you to communicate with other people and professionals?
14. If you could sum up the candidate in a paragraph, what would it be?
Example Essays From Other Teams
FROM Team 365 MOE for John Larock

Encouraging Delaware to embrace FIRST has been John’s goal for the past 12 yrs. Through countless hours his leadership has brought together mentors, students, parents & sponsors to build an organization that positively impacts our tri-state area. John is team founder, Executive Team leader & President of First State Robotics, Inc. His efforts to bring STEM to the attention of students regionally have been recognized with a Jefferson Award, Governor’s Volunteerism Award, & FIRST Volunteer of the Year. He has coached FLL & JFLL teams for 4 yrs.

John spreads FIRST to the community through hundreds of demos & presentations at schools, community events & businesses. He is responsible for DuPont’s support of FIRST, which now includes 10 FRC teams & the Philly Regional. Partnering with Salem Community College (SCC) & FRC316, John founded the off-season Duel on the DE, now in its 10th year, and added a book drive & job fair. He developed a school robotics curriculum & cowrote a robotics chapter in Teaching & Learning Science. John is a member of the Mid-Atlantic Robotics, Inc. nominating committee.

John created MOE U, our fall training program where students learn engineering, machine shop skills & earn up to 18 college credits at SCC. He challenged students to build a literacy program that has reached thousands of children with team-authored books donated to schools & libraries worldwide. He & a student designed a 1 day competition to introduce FIRST & demonstrate GP to N. Irish students learning to work together through the Ulster Project. They’ve adopted it as an annual program.

MOE is recognized throughout FIRST because of John. He is on the planning team for Ramp Riot, FRC341’s offseason event. For the past 4 years he has presented at the Championship FIRST Robotics Conference & a local kick-off, including “How to Become a Chairman’s Award Winner” & “Multi-school Teams.” He developed MOEmentum in 2003, a web-based weekly guide for rookie FRC teams. Teams worldwide have commented its value as a tool in helping their programs.

John coaches our strategists, scouts & award subteams. With John’s guidance, the team formed a Student Council that is now more involved with the management of the team.

John mentors MOE’s mentors, and his guidance & experience is sought after by many FIRST mentors & FIRST staff – he is the go-to resource in the region.

“In a room full of experienced FIRST mentors, John stands out as a shining example in his own unassuming, friendly way. No one has so successfully recruited & retained mentors & event volunteers the way he has. As a master communicator, his enthusiasm for engineering not only affects countless students in the greater DE region in exceptional ways, but every adult he brings into the fold is uplifted by his presence. When the WFA was created it was as if they had John in mind.” Rich Kressley, FRC1712.
“Mr. MOE” is the duct tape that holds our team together & is THE reason FIRST is present in DE.
FROM Team 121 Rhode Warriors for David Anthony

Team 121 would like to nominate David Anthony Ferreira for the Woodie Flowers award, for his incredible amount of dedication, determination and hard work for our team. Dave works everyday 8-5 as a construction worker and yet is at our work space every night pouring his heart and soul into this team. The dedication that he has shown to 121 is remarkable; the students are overwhelmed with his willingness to be a mentor and a leader to our team. He was one of the founding members of our team, as a student nine years ago. He learned under dedicated mentors back then, and is now continuing the tradition himself.

Dave is a very understanding person and will take the time to explain any question that the students have thoroughly and helps to expand on those ideas. This year we have had many new students join our team and he has made them all feel very welcome. “He took me aside at one of our first meetings and made sure I understood the game and our robot’s design” - Emily (121 junior). However, Emily is not the only student that he has helped along the way, “When I first came here, he said I could work on the robot everyday and not to be pushed around by the older kids” - Matt (121 sophomore). “He has taught me to use many of the tools and has led me in building the robot and in competing” - Kevin (121 senior).

Dave starts working with the students on ideas to build the robot minutes after the kickoff presentation is over. He helps us to develop the concepts and strategies for the most effective robot possible. “Dave is very open to suggestion and encourages everyone to contribute in the discussion” - Rob (121 junior). “He adds to other people’s ideas; his experience and expertise add to the quality of the robot” - Bridgette (121 sophomore). “He takes all of our sketches and ideas and begins to show us how to fabricate the necessary parts to produce the robot we have designed.” - Megan (121 senior). He encourages us to share our ideas in hopes that we can improve or expand on each other’s ideas. Dave demonstrates his leadership by letting us know of the projects that need to be completed, he then breaks us up into groups so that everything is accomplished and no one is left out.

Dave shows a never-ending supply of enthusiasm; even in the off-season Dave is busy spreading the ideals of FIRST throughout the state of Rhode Island. He believes that FIRST is a year round commitment, and he proves this by spending his off-season time joining 121 in demonstrating our robot at different events in the state.

Dave’s dedication to team 121 is surpassed by no one. He has inspired 121 to become more like a family instead of just a team. We all feel that he deserves this award more than words can describe. He has encouraged us to grow as a team and as individuals. “No one else’s dedication compares to Dave’s. We are gifted to have someone like him on our team” - Rob (121 junior). Dave has shown that a lot can be accomplished if you work hard and believe in yourself and everything that you do. Without Dave, 121 would not be what it is today; he is the weld that holds our team together.
FROM Team 234 Cyber Blue for Chris Fultz

Chris Fultz, Cyber Blue’s lead mentor, always guides our team towards balance, success in FIRST, “the bigpicture,” and a clear vision of what we can be. Chris teaches us, through example, to never stop seeking new challenges. He pushes us to keep growing our projects, community outreach, and team involvement. Chris leads us in developing ideas and tackling challenging projects during the summer and fall. He helps us reach out to other FIRST teams.

Chris strongly believes in student leadership. He loves hearing us explain engineering, FIRST, and our team to others. He encourages us to lead meetings and teach our peers but is still there to guide us. Chris initiated the use of student presenters at The Championship Forums, breaking the tradition of mentor-only presentations (FIRST has adopted this policy and recommends teams use student/mentor combinations as Forums presenters). Chris’ most notable impact on our team is the implementation of “real world” engineering.

Each season, Chris leads us in discussion from formal game requirements to robot design. Through his leadership, we have implemented a Critical Design Review where senior engineers from our sponsors serve as a panel for our student-led review. We learn to present our ideas and defend them as we are critiqued. At the end of each season, Chris engages us in lessons learned review to help us improve continuously. His effectiveness in growing future leaders is evident at Purdue University and IUPUI, where Cyber Blue alumni have started rookie teams and continue as mentors. Chris’ mentorship doesn’t end when members graduate; he continues to stay connected with them, encouraging them in their new leadership roles. He works tirelessly to secure co-op and internship opportunities for current students and alumni of FIRST programs.

Many of our alumni are now Rolls-Royce employees. Each fall, Chris leads us in projects that help us grow in our technical knowledge. Chris has led us through Design of Experiments processes to evaluate belt versus chain drives. He helped us design experiments to test belt drives in simulated FRC situations. We published our results to share with FIRST and presented our findings at the Championship Forums. He worked with Team 221, LLC to allow us to help in the development of their new “Wild Swerve” modules. Rather than purchasing the modules, we worked with their prototypes to learn the system. We wrote the assembly instructions that the company now ships with each set.

Chris’ influence doesn’t end with Team 234. At Rolls-Royce, he is a member of the Engineering Education Committee and has been instrumental in Rolls-Royce’s funding of all central Indiana teams, The Championship Forums, and the Boilermaker Regional. He worked to present Indianapolis as an option for the new site of The Championships. He recruited Cyber Blue students to share our team’s experiences with FIRST’s visitors to Indianapolis. Chris helped grow the Indiana Robotics Invitational to 72 teams from across the globe. He has played an important role in securing sponsors of scholarships for students attending the IRI. He spearheads a fundraiser which benefits a local charity each year. He encourages our students to not just compete, but to volunteer, learn, and lead at this event.
“Try to see the bigger picture – the robot is almost a distraction – focus on the learning, on teamwork, on defending your ideas, on being proud of what you have done, and on the friendships you can develop. The FIRST experience is so much more than robot matches.”

Chris Fultz’s advice from his
FROM Team 64 The Gilla Monsters  Mike Rush

Team 64, The Gilla Monsters, was started in 1998 by a group of General Motors engineers led by a bright young go-getter named Michael Rush. He searched for high schools willing to participate in the FIRST program that GM wanted so desperately to mentor. Mike, the leader amongst the engineers and the teachers, combined two high schools with two completely different backgrounds and made them into one focused team.

At the beginning of each build season, Mike organized engineering projects, such as a mouse trap car or the sturdiest tower of straws. He separated the team, breaking clichés within it, and focused on the importance of teamwork with strangers and friends. He also separated the team during the first week, and told them to develop ideas for their ideal robot. He, then, united the ideas and made a realistic hodgepodge out of it. Not only was he the mastermind behind many of their innovative designs (which helped to win numerous awards), he also treated all students with equal fairness and showed them how to engineer even if that was not their forte. Mike would always lead by example; when a student would ask him how to do something, like drill a hole, he would always drop what he was doing and show the student how to drill the hole. Rather than doing a task himself, he would go out of his way to find a student to perform the task. He also taught the importance of maintaining gracious professionalism on and off the field, by always helping teams in need and by making friendships amongst the toughest competitors.

When he left the Gilla Monsters to pursue his own career, he still served as a mentor to the many teams he made relationships with while on team 64. Carol Popovich, of the Arizona Regional Planning Committee, states that Mike “taught other interested FIRST volunteers how to mentor teams, thereby increasing the reach of FIRST to new teams” and personally donated to the Arizona Regional. As of this season, he put aside his personal time to devote himself to a rookie team, who seems to have a promising chance as a formidable competitor at the Arizona Regional.

Mike’s accomplishments with the Gilas were only the beginning. While on team 64, Mike spawned relationships with students and teachers that would follow him even after he left the Gilas. Mike had the special ability to inspire anyone he came in contact with. Mike’s leadership on the Gilla Monsters helped inspire others to start new teams. Teams 498 and 812 were started by a teacher, Rob Maineri, from team 64 who asserts that Mike “gave students a passion for engineering and science through not only his words, but with his obvious love for the profession. I am a better mentor, teacher, team coordinator, and person because of him.” Team 1011 was started by a group of students who were particularly close to Mike and wanted to pass on his message to a new group of students.

Mike Rush is a man who has become a mentor of mentors to the lives of students, teachers, and members in the community of FIRST. He always has time to promote the
genuine spirit of FIRST. More importantly, he encourages students to learn and teach others just as he has done. Mike teaches mentoring workshops several times a year to help out new and struggling mentors from all over the southwest. As the Gila Monsters have been successful, so have the offspring of Mike’s first team. Mike will always be an outstanding mentor and an even more extraordinary teacher.
FROM Team 131 Team Chaos for David Kelso

All people require a leader and a role model while growing up. This is especially the case for young students and teenagers maturing into adults. For some, this significant influence is a parent, athlete, or other famous person, but it is most impressive and meaningful when the guide for a student is their teacher or mentor. Mr. Kelso is that role model for FIRST participants around the country, of all ages.

The admiration and respect students feel for David Kelso also resonates through other mentors involved in Science and Technology. Andy Baker, well-respected FIRST mentor of team 45, recently posted a statement on the Chief Delphi forum concerning Mr. Kelso, in which he said, "For he is the hero of many FIRSTers, myself included..when I grow up, I wanna be like Dave." David J. Kelso is a science teacher at Manchester Central High School. His hands on, exciting approach to science and technology has been displayed in the classroom for 30 years. Although Mr. Kelso's teaching style eliminated the typical classroom atmosphere, he still wanted more. In order to raise the bar of a quality educational experience, this leader got involved in FIRST and continues to cause C.H.A.O.S. eleven years later.

This was trying at times considering the constant search for funding. Justin Tresvik, former member of team 147 and current employee at Autodesk, says a person has to have certain qualities to run a FIRST team, "You need someone who kids can look up to, respect, call a friend[..]You need someone not just to lead the team, but to inspire the team, a Dave Kelso."

Here David Kelso's extraordinary teaching skills are portrayed through the inclusion of the term friend. As an instructor and friend, as mentioned above, his inspiration and support reach far beyond the bounds of his own team. Andy Grady, Team 126, adds, "I have learned a lot from him and consider him to be one of my biggest influences."

Not limiting his resources to his team, Kelso has volunteered at events from FIRST camp and the rookie workshop to the Championship Event. He also assisted in the designing of the EDU bot learning modules. His daughter, Kristen Kelso, mentor to team 1307, notes, "At the FLL tournament, I was presented with the Young Adult Coach/ Mentor Award. I attribute my success as a mentor to my father. His enthusiasm for science and technology are his footsteps which I strive to follow.. Not going unnoticed,

Mr. Kelso was honored as the eighth Unsung FIRST hero (UFH). The Chief Delphi website describes its UFHERs as people that make FIRST what it is. The site states, "they exude gracious professionalism, a great mental spirit, and the fortitude that makes us all proud to be involved. David Kelso's unsurpassed commitment and dedication are the driving forces behind team C.H.A.O.S., however it is the charisma and altruism that he has instilled in each of its members that has kept the C.H.A.O.S. spirit alive. Adam Laferriere, a sophomore on C.H.A.O.S., agrees by saying, .I can easily see how a leader like Mr. K would be hard to replace. When he leaves he will take a part of the team with him..