



2026/2027 EC Day Challenge Student Handbook

Artificial Intelligence, Power, and Ethics

This handbook applies to all teams entering the written report stage.
Teams who qualify for the Oral Presentations will separately receive the Finalist Guide.

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1. Welcome

Welcome to the Entente Cordiale Day Challenge 2026/2027. The Entente Cordiale Day Association brings together students and alumni from universities in the United Kingdom, France, and the United States to develop solution-focused research on a shared annual theme.

Teams submit a written report responding to this year's theme. The 10 best reports from each country are selected for the Entente Cordiale Day Summit, where finalists present their proposed solutions to a Grand Jury.

1.1 Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook sets out the rules, deadlines, and expectations that apply to every team during the registration and written report stages. Please read it in full before you begin work on your report and refer back to it as you write.

Teams who place in the top ten for their country will receive a separate Finalist Guide covering the Oral Presentations, travel, and prizes in detail.

1.2 Questions and Sources of Information

General questions about the competition should be sent to info@ententecordialeday.org. Questions specific to the academic content of your report should be sent to academics@ententecordialeday.org.

Up-to-date information about the Challenge, its theme, and upcoming events is published at www.ententecordialeday.org.

1.3 Key Dates

Milestone	Date
Team Registration Opens	4 July 2026
Team Registration Deadline	30 October 2026
Registration Amendments Deadline (team names, report title, outline)	30 October 2026
Report Submission Deadline	10 January 2027
Publication of Written Jury Results	18 February 2027
Entente Cordiale Day Summit	7-8 April 2027

Unless stated otherwise, the deadline for every date above is 23:59 Anywhere on Earth (AoE).

1.4 The Theme: Artificial Intelligence, Power, and Ethics

The 2026/2027 Challenge moves away from abstract definitions of AI. We treat Artificial Intelligence not as a neutral software tool, but as a lever of power that carries profound ethical consequences. Submissions must not simply describe an AI technology; they must identify a specific locus of power it alters and propose a concrete technical, regulatory, or governance framework to ethically manage that shift.

Artificial Intelligence: all computational models and technologies that are able to do tasks usually associated with human intelligence. This encompasses both machine learning and non-learning algorithms - consider a wider range of applications than the recent arrival of large language models (LLMs).

Technical submissions proposing engineering architectures, algorithmic designs, or scientific frameworks are as central to this challenge as policy or legal proposals. Furthermore, we actively seek submissions that propose viable business models, market incentives, or corporate governance structures that align profitability with ethical AI deployment. The competition does not privilege one mode of solution over another.

Power: the capacity to direct, control, or influence the behaviour of actors or the allocation of resources. This includes sovereign power (state surveillance, defence, border control), market power (monopolies, labour displacement, data harvesting), and discursive power (control over information ecosystems, epistemic trust, and public narrative). In a commercial context, this includes supply chain dominance, computational monopolies, algorithmic pricing control, and the power to dictate industry standards.

Ethics: this moves beyond vague notions of “fairness”. It requires addressing specific structural harms: for example, accountability vacuums in autonomous decision-making, the amplification of systemic biases, the erosion of cognitive liberty, resource extraction, or the tension between national security imperatives and individual human rights. Submissions should consider how these ethical principles can be operationalized within corporate governance structures, product lifecycles, and engineering pipelines.

To ensure reports are solution-focused, teams must anchor their analysis within one of the following operational tracks. Example problem statements are provided - participants are encouraged to write their own to suit the topic they choose to tackle.

Track A: Sovereign Power & Geopolitical Security

This track addresses how states and defense contractors deploy AI to project power, secure critical infrastructure, or maintain domestic order, and the technical and ethical guardrails required to prevent systemic overreach.

Example problem statements:

- *How can democratic nations build accountability structures for the deployment of predictive AI in law enforcement and state surveillance without entirely halting technological efficacy?*
- *What international governance or non-proliferation frameworks can realistically regulate the development and deployment of Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS) given current geopolitical fragmentation?*
- *Propose an engineering architecture and procurement framework for integrating predictive AI into national grid defences, that preserve human oversight while maintaining millisecond response times.*

Track B: Market Consolidation & Labor Autonomy

This track investigates the shifting power dynamics driven by hyper-consolidated technology sectors, the business models that sustain them (e.g., compute-as-a-service, data scraping), and their impact on global labor markets.

Example problem statements:

- *As frontier AI models increasingly centralise economic power within a handful of multinational firms, what regulatory mechanisms (e.g., antitrust, public compute infrastructure) can states deploy to protect digital sovereignty and public interest?*
- *Design a viable corporate accountability framework or legislative policy that mitigates the displacement of knowledge-workers while protecting worker data privacy from invasive algorithmic management.*
- *Develop a business model and technical roadmap for a “public compute infrastructure” that allows mid-sized enterprises to compete with tech monopolies without compromising proprietary data privacy.*

Track C: Information Integrity & Algorithmic Liability

This track targets the business models and algorithms that drive the information economy, focusing on the erosion of shared reality and the technical/regulatory mechanisms needed to assign liability and restore trust.

Example problem statements:

- *Propose a scalable, technically feasible solution (e.g., cryptographic watermarking, decentralised verification protocols) to combat state-sponsored AI disinformation campaigns while strictly protecting online freedom of speech.*
- *How should legal systems assign liability for structural ethical harms (such as algorithmic radicalisation or algorithmic price-fixing) when the underlying system operates as an uninterpretable “black box”?*
- *Design a commercial framework and cryptographic verification standard (e.g., decentralized watermarking) that major social platforms could adopt to monetize ‘verified synthetic media’ while penalizing malicious deepfakes.*

Track D: Independent Focus

Teams may define their own specific intersection of AI, Power, and Ethics outside of Tracks A, B, and C. However, the report must still target a specific, identifiable power imbalance caused by AI, and propose a concrete, actionable framework to resolve it. Broad, theoretical overviews will not score highly.

2. Registering as a Team

2.1 Eligibility

- Each team must comprise exactly three students. Individual submissions are not permitted.
- All members must be currently enrolled at an accredited higher education institution in the UK, France, or the US, and may be of any nationality.
- Undergraduate, Master's, and Doctoral students are all eligible, and a team may mix degree levels, faculties, or universities, provided all members are enrolled in the same country.
- Students who have deferred or interrupted their studies for up to six months remain eligible.
- Recent graduates, visiting scholars, and students whose graduation date falls before April 2027 are not eligible.

The organisers reserve the right to close registration early in the event of exceptionally high demand, or to extend the registration deadline if needed.

2.2 Completing Registration

Each team completes a short online form (available on our [website](#) from 4th July), providing each member's full name, course, level of study, department or institution, and institutional email, along with a preliminary report title, keywords (at least three) and outline. The outline should set out:

- The research problem and motivation for the work
- Background and related work
- The novelty of the research
- The intended research approach
- Potential results

You may revise your title, outline, up to 80% of your keywords or registered team names at any time up to the Registration Amendments Deadline (December 2026). Amendments cannot be accepted after this date.

If your details are valid and your title and outline are relevant to the theme, you will receive a confirmation email and a unique Team ID, which you should keep for all future correspondence.

3. Writing the Report

3.1 Developing Your Solution

Analysing a problem is not sufficient on its own: your report must also propose a solution that is feasible, original, and clearly responsive to a problem you have identified, while engaging with all three components of the theme.

Although this is a Franco-British-American competition, your solution does not need to be limited to those three countries; you are welcome to apply your ideas to any country or region, provided your reasoning is well-articulated and contextually appropriate.

A feasible solution is one that could, in principle, be implemented. Ambitious or transformative proposals are welcome, but you must show you have thought through how they could be carried out, by whom, and under what conditions, including:

- A clear plan or model showing how the solution would be developed and executed
- Consideration of financial, logistical, technical, political, or cultural constraints
- An understanding of the stakeholders affected by or involved in the solution
- Potential challenges or risks, and how you would mitigate them

Originality means going beyond existing models rather than rehashing well-known solutions, whether through a novel practical intervention, firsthand research (interviews, fieldwork, surveys), or a theoretical or conceptual contribution that meaningfully advances the debate. Challenging the assumptions behind the theme itself is welcome, provided your argument is well-substantiated.

3.2 Format and Style

- Reports must be written in English or French (allowed only for teams in France).
- Submit as a single PDF, double-spaced, font size 11 or 12, with margins of at least 2.5 cm on all sides.
- Include page numbers on every page except the cover page.
- Do not include your name or institution anywhere in the report; reports are marked anonymously.

You may write in a formal academic register or a more reflective first-person style, provided the result is clear, professional, and well-referenced. A forward-looking, speculative approach is welcome where it is well-reasoned. If you use a significant number of specialist acronyms or non-English/French terms, consider including a short glossary in the appendices.

You can find awarded reports of the precedent editions online.

3.3 Methodology and Ethical Approval

Use research methods appropriate to your discipline and justify your choice of methodology clearly in the report. Whatever approach you take, reflect critically on its limitations and how these may affect your findings.

If you plan to collect data from human participants (e.g., interviews or surveys), you must request ethical approval in advance, submitting a proposed interview schedule or survey, a draft information sheet, and a draft consent form **before you begin data collection**. An appropriate form and template will be disseminated following registration.

3.4 Word Limit

Reports must be between 3,000 and 5,000 words. This includes the main text, footnotes, endnotes, tables, figures, captions, and any table of contents. It excludes the cover page, appendices, and bibliography. Reports under 3,000 words and superior to 5,000 words will be penalised in marking, and content needed to assess your work should appear in the main body rather than an appendix or footnote.

3.5 Cover Page

Your cover page must include only: (1) the total word count, (2) the name and logo of the competition, (3) the 2026/2027 theme, (4) a clear, concise report title, and (5) an acknowledgement of any external support received, where applicable. It must not contain anything that could identify your team or institution, and is not included in the word count.

3.6 Third-Party Images and Copyright

Any images you include must be properly credited, and either licensed for reuse (for example under a Creative Commons 4.0 licence) or used with the explicit written permission of the copyright holder. This applies to all visual content: photographs, illustrations, diagrams, and charts. Do not include copyrighted material without clear, documented consent from its owner — reports containing unauthorised images may have the offending material removed prior to publication, or be disqualified. If in doubt, use original visuals or images from reputable open-source platforms that clearly state their usage rights.

3.7 Referencing

There is no single referencing style mandated by the Challenge. Choose whichever convention is standard in your discipline (for example APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, IEEE, Vancouver, or OSCOLA), and apply it consistently with a complete bibliography. In general, you may either:

- Use full references in footnotes or endnotes, numbered serially, with a complete alphabetised bibliography; or
- Use an author-date (“Harvard-style”) system, with brief in-text citations and a complete alphabetised reference list at the end.

Note that footnote and endnote text counts toward your word limit, while a bibliography at the end of the report does not (this is one reason teams often prefer the author-date system).

3.8 Appendices and Supplementary Materials

You may include appendices or supplementary materials (e.g., survey results, technical schematics) to support your submission, and may embed hyperlinks to external sources such as interactive maps or tools, provided all links are functional and publicly accessible.

3.9 Academic Integrity

All submitted work must be original. Academic misconduct — including plagiarism, collusion, contract cheating, and data fabrication — will be investigated and may result in your report being suspended from consideration.

Authors must write all text themselves. Using generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT or other LLMs) to produce text, images, or data is a form of academic misconduct **unless you have informed the EC Day Board of this use in advance and disclosed it transparently** within the report. Grammar-checking tools (e.g., Grammarly) and citation managers (e.g., Zotero) are permitted without disclosure.

3.10 Submitting Your Report

Submit your report as a PDF, titled with your Team ID, through the official submission form as soon as it is ready — early submission is encouraged in case of technical issues. Once submitted, your report is final: it cannot be amended, and any further submissions will be discarded.

If extenuating circumstances mean you need an extension, email academics@ententecordialeday.org before the deadline with written supporting evidence (e.g., medical confirmation). Approved extensions still carry a points penalty; see the Point Penalties appendix for details.

4. How Reports Are Marked

4.1 The Written Jury

Each report is independently assessed by two markers with relevant disciplinary expertise, who do not consult one another.

Marker identities and report assignments are not disclosed during marking, to protect impartiality, though the full list of Written Jury members is published once the competition concludes.

Each juror scores your report out of 50 against the five criteria below (see the Grade Descriptors appendix for full detail), for a possible 100 points in total.

- Quality of Writing (10 points)
- Quality of Research (10 points)
- Clarity of the Problem (10 points)
- Originality of Solution (10 points)
- Feasibility of Solution (10 points)

4.2 Publication of Results

Teams placing in the top ten will be invited to the Oral Presentations on 8 April 2027 and will receive the separate Finalist Guide. Top-ten finalists' names, institutions, and report titles are published on the website unless anonymity has been requested and approved (see Section 5).

4.3 Reaching the Finals

The top ten teams from each of the UK, France, and the US will be invited to the Entente Cordiale Day Summit on 7–8 April 2027, where they will present their proposed solutions to a Grand Jury. The five best teams from each country are awarded the Entente Cordiale Prizes, and the remaining five finalists from each country receive a Finalist Certificate.

Full logistics for finalists — the presentation schedule, format and timing rules, slide requirements, travel and visa information, accessibility arrangements, and prize details — are provided separately in the Finalist Guide, sent to qualifying teams alongside their results. If needed, you can find last year version on our website.

5. Confidentiality, Data, and Publication Rights

We handle personal data in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Only the data needed to run the competition is collected (e.g., name, contact details, institution), and it is used solely for communication, evaluation, and — where applicable — publication of winning entries. Your data is stored securely and never shared with third parties without your explicit consent. You may access, correct, or request deletion of your data at any time by contacting info@ententecordialeday.org.

If your report places in the top ten for your country, it will be shared with the Grand Jury for final evaluation and published on our website as part of the official winning entries, and may also be shared with sponsors or partners. Published top-ten reports are licensed under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0): others may reuse your work provided they credit you, and you retain full rights to publish or adapt it elsewhere afterwards. By entering, you agree that the Association retains the right to be the first to publish your work if it is selected.

Authorship is normally credited publicly for all top-ten reports, as recognition of authorship is considered an important part of the competition. Anonymity is not granted by default for top-ten entries, but if you have a compelling reason to request it (for example, personal safety, political sensitivity, or institutional restrictions), contact us as early as possible — requests are reviewed case by case.

6. Feedback and Appeals

You may request a summary of your Written Jury feedback at any time after receiving your result by emailing academics@ententecordialeday.org. Team details and feedback summaries are retained for up to one year after results are published.

We are unable to offer remarking or appeals against a mark. If you believe your team has been treated unfairly in the process itself, please complete the Complaint Form available on our website as soon as possible.

Appendix A: Written Report Grade Descriptors

General Meaning	Quality of Writing	Quality of Research	Clarity of the Problem	Originality of Solution	Feasibility of Solution
	<i>Have teams written clear, professional reports that read well?</i>	<i>Are the arguments credible, evidenced, and cited correctly? Are there any gaps in the research?</i>	<i>Have teams clearly identified a problem that is well-defined, important, and aligned with all three aspects of the theme?</i>	<i>Is the idea innovative and forward-thinking? Does the report break new ground in terms of concept, method, or execution?</i>	<i>Have the teams thoughtfully considered how it could be developed, resourced, and executed in practice?</i>
Outstanding 10	Writing is extremely professional, clear, and persuasive, with excellent grammar, spelling, and syntax. Arguments are logically structured and effectively communicated.	Comprehensive, well-structured research that demonstrates an outstanding understanding of relevant theories, concepts, and prior studies. Sources are varied, credible, and cited correctly.	Problem is clear, highly specific, and thoroughly justified. Its importance is compellingly explained. Seamlessly integrates all three theme aspects in a sophisticated way.	Solution is highly original, offering a novel perspective that demonstrates deep critical thinking and creativity.	Solution is highly feasible and practical, with clear, actionable implications supported by strong evidence or logical reasoning.
Excellent 9 / Very Good 8 / Good 7	Writing is mostly clear and well-structured. Arguments are generally logical and well-articulated. There may be a few minor errors in grammar or spelling.	Good research with relevant theories and studies covered. Sources are credible and cited, though there may be minor gaps in depth or diversity.	Problem is clearly defined and well-justified. Its importance is well-explained, though some areas could be further expanded. Connects to all three aspects of the theme.	Solution is somewhat original, with evidence of critical thinking and some creative elements. Builds effectively on existing knowledge.	Solution is feasible and has practical applications, though implementation may require further development or refinement.
Competent 6 / Passable 5 / Weak 4	Writing is understandable but may lack clarity or contain noticeable grammar and	Adequate research with some relevant information, but lacks depth or diversity, or includes minor	Problem is identified and reasonably well explained. Its	Solution shows limited originality, primarily reiterating existing ideas without much	Solution has some feasibility, but its applicability is limited or supported by weak

General Meaning	Quality of Writing	Quality of Research	Clarity of the Problem	Originality of Solution	Feasibility of Solution
	syntax errors. Structure and flow of arguments are inconsistent.	inaccuracies. Limited engagement with academic sources.	importance is noted but may lack depth. Connects to all three theme aspects, though some may feel less integrated.	innovation. There is some critical thinking.	evidence. Implementation would face significant challenges.
Poor 3 / Very Poor 2 / Inadequate 1	Writing is poorly constructed, with frequent grammar and spelling errors that hinder understanding. Arguments lack coherence and clarity.	Superficial research with significant gaps or over-reliance on non-credible sources. Understanding of key concepts is limited.	Problem lacks depth or specificity. Importance is briefly mentioned but not well-supported. Connection to the theme may be superficial or missing one aspect.	Solution is unoriginal and lacks any creative or critical elements. Merely repeats information without adding value.	Solution is largely impractical or unsupported by evidence, with minimal consideration of real-world application.
No Attempt 0	Writing is totally unclear and riddled with errors, making the arguments difficult to follow or understand.	Minimal or no research is evident. Information is largely irrelevant or incorrect.	No clear problem is identified, or it is entirely irrelevant to the theme. Importance is not addressed at all.	No evidence of originality or critical thought in the solution.	Solution is entirely infeasible, with no consideration of applicability or evidence to support it.

Appendix B: Written Report Point Penalties

Violation	Penalty
The report is submitted after the stated deadline.	Disqualification unless pre-approved. Unless an exemption is granted, -1 point for every day after the deadline, to a maximum of -5 points before disqualification.
The report contains the names of team members.	-1 point for every instance found. The team must resubmit the report; if resubmitted after the deadline, late-submission penalties may also apply.
The report exceeds the word limit.	-5 points for each 100 words over the limit.
The cover page is missing essential elements such as the title or word count.	-1 point. The team must resubmit the report; if resubmitted after the deadline, late-submission penalties may also apply.
The report contains plagiarised content or violates ethical research standards.	Immediate disqualification following review.