

IFTSA Undergraduate Research Competition

RULES AND GUIDELINES

BACKGROUND

Designed to showcase outstanding research at the undergraduate level, this competition seeks students engaged in independent research who are interested in presenting at the IFT Annual Event. Finalists will have the opportunity to network with industry and academic members.

PURPOSE

1. Encourage and stimulate interest in independent undergraduate research in the area of food science and technology.
2. Provide an opportunity for undergraduates to organize and present their original research through oral and poster presentations.
3. Enable students to build the technical and professional skills needed to thrive in and contribute to the evolving food industry.

SCHEDULE

Date	Event
April 15, 2026	Application submission deadline
May 15, 2026	Finalists notified
July 12 - July 15, 2026	IFT FIRST in Chicago

ELIGIBILITY

1. Any student member of IFT, as of April 1, 2026, who is an undergraduate student.
2. All submissions must represent original work conducted individually by an undergraduate student. Abstracts consisting solely of literature reviews or statements of need, without the presentation of original research or development, will not be accepted.
3. A signed letter from the Department Head or a professor verifying the originality of the student's work will be required. The letter and abstract must be submitted through the IFT.org submission portal by April 15th at 11:59 p.m. CST (Chicago Time UTC-6). Applications received after April 15th will not be accepted.
4. The winner of the most recent competition is not eligible to compete again in this competition. However, they are encouraged to participate in another IFTSA competition.

PRELIMINARY ROUND PROCEDURES

Application

1. To enter the competition, students must be student members of IFT by April 15th at 11:59 p.m. CST (Chicago Time UTC-6).
2. Abstracts must not exceed five hundred (500) words in length (titles not included), and should include the study objective, methodology, results, and significance and implications of results. At least five (5) pertinent references must be included. References are not included in the word count and must follow the Journal of Food Science citation style.
3. Two (2) versions of the abstract must be submitted. One (1) must include the paper title, as well as the name and address of the author. The second version of the abstract must only include the paper title (no university or institution names included). In both versions, no professors' names may appear as co-author.
4. A letter, signed by the student's Department Head or professor, verifying the originality of the work, must be submitted.

Judging

Abstracts will be judged based on the criteria below and ranked as outlined in the supplemental operations document. Finalists will be chosen by a jury of at least three (3) IFT members representing academia, industry, and/or government as appointed by the Competition Chair.

1. Each submission will be reviewed by at least three (3) judges.
2. Each entry will be scored based on 100 points, with the points to be distributed as shown in the rubric.
3. Judges will select a maximum of six (6) finalists.
4. All competing teams will be informed of only their respective scores and judges' comments. Each judge will provide 1-2 sentences of feedback at a minimum.
5. Finalists will be notified of their status by May 15th.
6. If selected, finalists will present their research as a poster and oral presentation at the IFT FIRST.

FINAL ROUND PROCEDURES

Poster Presentation

Finalists will present their posters digitally/physically during the IFT FIRST. You must print your own poster and bring it with you to IFT FIRST in Chicago. Printed posters must fit on the 3.75 ft. tall by 7 ft. wide board that will be provided by IFT. Your poster should be smaller than these dimensions and does not need to cover the entire board.



1. Finalists will present their research to judges, as well as other event attendees, during the 60–90-minute poster session.
2. The posters may include, but are not limited to, sections detailing
 - a. The purpose of the work
 - b. Experimental methodology/design
 - c. Results
 - d. Significance of the results
3. All text and images should be with high resolution and be clearly visible from a short distance.
4. Finalists are expected to stand by their posters during the poster session and be prepared to introduce their research for 3-5 minutes and answer the judges' questions.

Judging

1. Posters will be judged based on the criteria outlined in the rubric.
2. Posters will be judged by a jury of at least three (3) IFT members representing academia, industry, and/or government.
3. No judge may vote on research presented by a member of their institution; adjustments will be made for this factor.

Oral Presentation

1. Finalists will present their research during the IFT FIRST.
2. The presentation is limited to ten (10) minutes per speaker, plus an additional five (5) minutes to answer questions from judges.
3. The presentation should outline the scope of the research, study methodology and design, results, and significance of the results.

Judging

1. Presentations will be judged based on the criteria outlined in the rubric.
2. Oral presentations will be judged by a jury of at least three (3) IFT members representing academia, industry, and/or government.
3. No judge may vote on research presented by a member of their institution; adjustments will be made for this factor.

AWARDS

1. A maximum of six (6) individuals will make it to the finals. The teams will all be judged against one another in the finals.
2. Each finalist will receive a travel and registration reimbursement of up to \$600.
3. The 1st place winner will receive \$1,000, the 2nd place winner will receive \$750, and the 3rd place winner will receive \$500.

NOTE

- Any participant that does not follow the IFT Event Code of Conduct will risk being disqualified.

Challenges and Penalties

Challenges based on rule infractions during oral presentations must be made immediately after the presentation, and no later than the finalization of scores. It is the duty of the Chair to ensure that infractions in written proposals and product tastings are noted. Scores should be considered finalized by one (1) hour prior to start of the IFTSA Closing Ceremony. No challenges will be entertained once this time has passed.

Challenges must be referred to the Chair and/or VP of Competitions. The Chair will refer challenges to the VP of Competitions, IFTSA Office of the President, and IFTSA Staff Liaison. It is the necessary duty that all Competition Chairs, VP of Competition, and IFTSA Office of the President report any infractions they receive or notice during competition. Final decisions on challenges, penalties, and IFT Code of Conduct will be made by the IFTSA Staff Liaison and disseminated to necessary parties. This may include input from judges.

QUESTIONS

Contact the IFTSA Undergraduate Research Competition Chair via email at iftsa.urb@gmail.com.