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your research as a bedtime story competition 2024

**About the competition**

The Doctoral and Researcher College Your Research as a Bedtime Story Competition has been established to experiment with research storytelling. This light-hearted competition will require you to strip your research story down to basic components and communicate it in language that is accessible from ages 5 to 100.

The winner chosen by the Judging Panel will receive an award of £100. The winner of the People’s Choice Award voted for by conference delegates will receive £50.

**Eligibility – who can apply?**

All current University of Reading doctoral researchers, including those undertaking professional doctorates, who have not graduated before 1 June 2024.

**Key dates**

* Entry deadline = 28 March 2024
* Date by which shortlisted finalists will be notified = 26 April 2024
* Doctoral Research Conference = 12 June 2024
* Overall winner announced = 12 June 2024
* People’s choice award announced = 12 June 2024

**Competition guidelines and rules**

Your challenge is to tell your research as a children’s bedtime story in no more than 150 words using a specific structure. The bedtime story must be based on the abstract for your own research. It should be simple to understand, be the kind of story that would be told to a child at bedtime or around a fire with family and have a comforting tone.

**Guidance**

Work through the following elements before you write your story.

1. **Who is the main character?** Will it be you as the researcher? Alternatively, it could be a main feature of your research – a gene, a painting, a language, a plant? There won’t be one single way to tell the story; your adventures as a researcher (such as trials that don’t work, archives that are closed, misunderstanding of a theory, lightbulb moments) will be different to those if you tell your story from the point of view of an element of your research (an artefact long buried and brought to light, a gene long misunderstood, a plant struggling to adapt to a changing environment).
2. **The character’s problem or goal.** Whoever your main character, decide what the character wants or is trying to achieve. What are the obstacles getting in their way? How do they overcome them?
3. **Change.** Is the character different by the end? Have they learned a new way to do something? Found a new audience? Adapted to a new situation? Developed new techniques? Understood their past mistakes?
4. **Enjoy it!** It’s not your viva, just a fun way to identify key story elements.

**Structure**.

Now write the story including these words for a structure: once upon a time - wanted – but – so

**Once upon a time (set the scene, introduce your character).**

*Once upon a time on a leafy campus there was a doctoral researcher from physics…*

**Wanted (the character’s goal or desire).**

*…who wanted to go to a seminar in the Edith Morley building…*

**But (an obstacle or complication).**

*but the map on the wall did not make any sense and she wandered the building for many decades, seeking the right room without success.*

**So (a reaction to the step above or a resolution).**

*So eventually, after her hair had long turned white, she decided to use her knowledge to create a portal and used it to take her back in time to her youth and to the right room for the seminar.*

Check that your language is simple and can be understood by people of all ages without specialist knowledge. Once you are happy with your story and it is no more than 150 words, submit it alongside a short academic abstract of your work (100 -300 words) using the form below.

An example of a bedtime story derived from a real PhD thesis is provided below.

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| **Example from a real PhD abstract**\* |
| **Research Abstract:** This study explores whether a non-dominant first language (Punjabi) is phonologically active while performing tasks in a dominant environmental language (English) and whether activation of the non-target language extends beyond semantic representations to the lexeme. Previous research using the phoneme monitoring paradigm among balanced bilinguals is here developed and applied to a novel population permitting exploration of co-activation in a language under considerable pressure. A second important element of the study is its attention to processing variance within a single bilingual population; the study gives high priority to assessing whether variance in bilinguals’ experimental performance can be explained by their fine-grained patterns of language use. Participants completed an auditory phoneme monitoring experiment in which they monitored the phonemic content of English picture names. Distracter phonemes from the Punjabi name of the pictures formed an experimental condition. Experimental data were complemented by interviews and surveys of language usage. Analysis explored for group-level differences and whether fine-grained differences in patterns of language use within the bilingual group (indexed through survey data) were able to account for some of the variance in bilingual processing (evident in experimental data). Group-level results were inconclusive as to whether Punjabi representations were accessed during the experimental task, but variables based on differences in Punjabi usage among bilinguals were able to account for a third of the variance in bilingual processing, in line with views of the language system as adaptive to external cues and requirements. Increased use of Punjabi in some usage measures was associated with the speed with which Punjabi distracter phonemes could be dismissed. The finding demonstrates that processing variance in bilinguals is not random, but can arise at least partially from different usage patterns. (280 words) |
| **Bedtime story:** Once upon a time there lived a language system so sophisticated that it could play the instrument of many languages all at once. People marveled at how the language system could make beautiful music with so many language instruments simultaneously, extremely fast and without getting muddled. The language system wanted to share this ability in every land, with all humans, and it travelled far and wide, switching between languages at a second’s notice, each language altering slightly the way listeners perceived their world. But one day the language system entered a land where people had forgotten the beauty made by hearing many tongues, preferring only one. They laughed at the minor languages, and called them awkward, ugly sounding and inelegant. So with sadness, the language system kept the smaller languages mostly hidden away, playing them only faintly, or in private, with only those who already knew and loved them.  (149 words) |

**Competition rules**

* Each student can submit only one entry.
* The entry must be the original work of the entrant.
* If your entry is selected then you should be able to attend the conference on 12 June 2024 and read your bedtime story.
* Entrants will be informed if their entry has been selected by 26 April 2024.
* We reserve the right to disqualify entries that don’t comply with the competition requirements.
* Events may occur that render the competition (or certain aspects of the competition) impossible due to reasons beyond the control of the University. Accordingly, the University may at its absolute discretion change, suspend or cancel the competition (or elements of it) if circumstances beyond its control make it necessary to do so.

**Deadline for competition entry: 28 March 2024**

**Notes -** This competition is based on an idea by Dr Anna Ploszajski. For more on Anna’s storytelling for research work see <https://www.annaploszajski.com/>. Example abstract and story: Joanna John.

**Your Research as a Bedtime Story Competition 2024**

**Entry Form**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **First name** |  |
| **Surname** |  |
| **Student number** |  |
| **Registration status** | On campus By distance |
| **University email address** |  |
| **Supervisor** |  |
| **School** |  |
| **Department** |  |

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| --- | --- |
| **Bedtime story title** |  |
| **Bedtime story (Max 150 words excluding title)** | |

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| **Research Abstract (100-300 words)** |
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| **Copyright & Liability**  The University will film the shortlisted entries and make these available online. By entering this competition you consent to the capture of your image in footage by the University. To the extent that such a recording captures a qualifying performance under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, you hereby authorise the University to reproduce, distribute and make available the recorded performance to the general public. You further agree to the use of your name, biographical information and photographs of you taken at the Doctoral Research Conference, for academic and/or marketing purposes.  You hereby grant to the University of Reading a non-exclusive, royalty-free license to use and reproduce your bedtime story for academic and/or marketing purposes (including in promotional materials), online and in all media as required, without further permission from, or compensation to, you. Credit will be given that identifies you as the author/performer of your bedtime story.  The University of Reading shall not be liable in any way for the content of your bedtime story. You represent and warrant to the University that (i) you are the creator and sole and exclusive owner of your bedtime story, or otherwise have all right and authority to grant to the University the rights described herein; and (ii) nothing in your bedtime story infringes the intellectual property or personal data rights of any third party. |
| **I have read the above statements about copyright and liability and accept and agree to them.**  **Name:**  **Signature:**  **Date:** |
| **DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION: 28 March 2024**  **Please send your entry to** [**DoctoralandResearcherCollege@reading.ac.uk**](mailto:DoctoralandResearcherCollege@reading.ac.uk)  If your entry is shortlisted you must be available to attend the Doctoral Research Conference on 12 June 2024 and read your bedtime story |

Please note if shortlisted, students will be required to be photographed, filmed and/or recorded, for the purposes of participating in the production of University photography, video or audio work.

Any personal data supplied on this form will be used to administer your competition entry and contact winners. Further information can be found in the University’s privacy policy. Shortlisted entrants and winners will be identified at the UoR Doctoral Research Conference and in Doctoral and Researcher College publications, including online.