

Judges Guidelines

Published Categories

The judges' guidelines cover two aspects of judging:

1. What to look for when evaluating the quality of this year's submissions, and
2. How to work as a judging team to come up with the shortlist and winner.

At the end of the document, you will find the following forms for judges to fill out:

1. *Judges' Information Form* – To be completed by each judge and submitted to the Awards Manager no later than **September 30 or one week after agreeing to be a judge, whichever is later. This form includes your confirmation that confidentiality will be maintained, and no submissions received will be shared or discussed publicly.**
2. *Shortlist Reporting Form* – One (1) copy PER JURY is to be completed for each category and submitted to the Awards Manager by **April 1. (If a jury is unable to reach agreement on a shortlist, contact the awards manager for instructions immediately).**
3. *Winner reporting Form* - One (1) copy PER JURY is to be completed for each category and submitted to the Awards Manager by **May 1 along with a short blurb about why this book was chosen.**

Evaluating the submissions

What is a crime book/short story?

For convenience, these guidelines will refer to novels, but much of this discussion applies to short stories, novellas, and nonfiction in English and French as well.

The Awards are for excellence in *crime writing*, not just mystery writing. This applies to both the fiction (books and short stories) and nonfiction categories. Mysteries are certainly a major subgenre within crime fiction, but they are by no means the only one.

Broadly speaking, you can look at a crime as any kind of offence or potential offence against a person, property or the wider community. Crime is at the core of a crime book, whether the premise of the book is to solve the crime, prevent the crime, perpetrate the crime, try the criminal in court, understand the criminal, etc. As long as there is (1) some kind of crime that is a major element in the book and (2) someone who has something to do with this crime – e.g., wants to solve it (whodunit), wants to prevent it (thriller), is the criminal (psychological suspense, caper), etc. – you have a crime novel. Conversely, **if you can remove the crime from the story and the book can still stand on its own, the book is not a crime story.**

The crime does not have to be murder. There are plenty of crimes that are not, such as, theft, fraud, abductions, white collar, technological, scientific, and terrorism. In the nonfiction category, economic

crimes, fraud, conspiracy (real or alleged), and the like are just as appealing to readers as murder and other violent crimes. Moreover, the setting can be anywhere and any time in history; you can even have a crime novel set in a fantasy or science fiction world.

Particularly in the case of crime fiction, please consider each book/story on its own merits. There is no reason why an excellent cozy or humorous mystery shouldn't win the best novel award. An award-winning book does not have to contain a message, nor does it have to change the reader's life. It must, however, be well-written and well-executed, and an exemplar of a book in its subgenre, whether it's a police procedural, a thriller, a traditional mystery, a caper, a cozy, true crime, or nonfiction.

NOTE 1: Don't compare a book (fiction or nonfiction), novella, or short story written by an author this year to a book/novella/short story they have written in the past. Only compare the work to other works submitted in the category.

NOTE 2: Publishers and authors submit their books to the category they think it fits best in. If in your opinion a title does not belong in your category, double-check the title against your official list and then, if it's listed, rate the book accordingly against the other entries in your category. If it's not listed, notify the awards coordinator, and follow their instructions about disregarding the book.

Points to consider

- Does the book fulfill the “promise” it makes to the reader? This promise may range from illuminating the dark side of human nature to providing a rollicking entertaining read but whatever the case, the reader should feel satisfied when they shut the book.
- Does the author balance show and tell (action versus exposition)? Does the author involve the reader in the characters' lives and actions?
- Is the puzzle or central problem presented in the book interesting and challenging?
- Is there an internal logic/consistency, and believability to all the elements (plot, characters, dialogue, facts, etc.) of the book? Do all the elements hold together and make the book greater than the sum of its parts?
- Does the book have a spark that elevates it above other similar books? Is the book memorable (in a good way)?
- FOR ALL CATEGORIES, DOUBLE CHECK THE COPYRIGHT DATE TO ENSURE THE NOVEL IS ELIGIBLE. COPYRIGHT DATE SHOULD BE **2023**. If you spot an issue with the copyright date that has slipped past the pre-check, notify the Awards Manager immediately.

Other considerations for specific categories

Best Crime First Novel

- An author entered in this category cannot have had any earlier novel of any kind published commercially:

- in print, electronic/e-book, or self-published; whether
- in Canada or any other country; whether
- in any genre, including literary fiction; whether
- under the author's given name or a pseudonym, and alone or jointly with another author

Note 1: A novel that has an ISBN (or ASIN) is considered published commercially.

Note 2: The author may be published in other formats (e.g., short stories, novella, non-fiction, plays/screenplays, poetry) and still be eligible to enter this category.

Short stories/novellas

- Take into consideration the word-count limitations of the short story and novella. If you think the short story or the novella is too long, please bring it to the attention of the Awards Manager.
- The **novella** category includes two kinds of novellas
 - those written for reluctant readers and ESL students; these novellas are often called rapid reads, easy reads, or similar terms; they feature limited vocabulary and no subplots; or those written for experienced English language readers who want a short but satisfying read;
- Please rate each submission based on its effectiveness and suitability for its intended audience, not on your personal preference or distaste for the language, characters, or subject matter.

Nonfiction

- Consider the quality/thoroughness of the research. This should be evident in the number and standard of citations in the footnotes and/or appendices.
- Does the author take a fresh and innovative approach to the subject matter? Are the premise and conclusions believable?

Juvenile/YA

- Are the story and writing style appropriate to the reading level the book is aimed at?
- This category is open to all juvenile and young adult crime fiction and nonfiction. In addition to the subgenre differences, consider the reading level-appropriateness of the subject matter and writing.

French

- Although most entries in this category will be adult fiction, like the juvenile/YA category, it is a catch-all: fiction and nonfiction, adult and juvenile/YA.

Howard Engel Award for Best Crime Novel Set in Canada

- Novels in this category might be traditional mystery, cozy, thriller, suspense, caper, or any other form of crime novel
- The majority of the work (60% or greater) must be set in any part of Canada.

- If you are not sure if the setting qualifies, please contact the Awards Manager.

The Whodunit Award for Best Traditional Mystery

- Whodunit mystery fiction is a puzzle story; it starts with a murder (or crime) and emphasizes the solving of the crime. The protagonist's job is to discover who committed the crime and why.
- Examples: Classic Golden Age style (Agatha Christie, Sherlock Holmes), Amateur Sleuth, Cozy, Private Eye, Police Procedural, Historical, Humorous, and Locked Room.

Working as a Judging Team

Judges should read the books and apply the included guidelines, or whatever specific evaluation tools they feel appropriate. What you're looking for is excellence in crime-writing: i.e., quality and originality of the premise and writing, regardless of subgenre.

In many cases, you should be able to tell after reading the first third (1/3) of the work whether it stands a chance or not. So, while you don't have to read **every** book cover to cover, please try to read **at least** the first third (1/3).

NOTE: All the judges should have read the shortlisted books in their entirety before a winner is determined.

Each judge should prepare a personal long list of about 10 books or stories (maybe fewer in small categories like French and Nonfiction), in order of preference, to give room for discussion with your judge colleagues.

Communication among panel members is important. Previous judges have found that the give-and-take between judges is one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of the task. Discussion can begin with group emails exchanging your lists and proceed to phone or video conferencing (CWC can set this up if requested), as agreed between all team members.

Once the three judges agree on the five finalists, one judge volunteers (or is appointed) to fill out the Shortlist Form and return it to the Awards Manager by **April 1**.

NOTES: Five finalists must be selected for the shortlist unless your category has less than 10 entries. In that case, you will receive special instructions at the start of the process.

Continue the consultation process with your fellow judges to determine the winner. At that time, one judge should fill out the Winner Form and send it to the Award Manager **on or before May 1**.

NOTE: If the judges cannot reach an agreement, contact the Awards Manager immediately. Each judge should then fill out their Shortlist Form, ranked in order of preference, and send it to the Awards Manager.

In addition to listing the winner's name and book, please include a brief blurb (150 to 200 words) explaining your panel's rationale for choosing the winner. How you produce this blurb is up to the team, but this one blurb should reflect the thinking of all three judges. The blurb will be read at the Awards Gala when the winner receives their award. **We need the blurb on or before May 1.**

Important Points

- 1. Judges are not to post reviews or comments on social media about books submitted in the category they are judging.**
- 2. No author or character should be dismissed because of gender, culture, religion, or origin.**
- 3. No judge should exert undue pressure on the other judges. If any judge feels such pressure, email the Awards Manager.**
- 4. To ensure the integrity of the selection process, do not discuss the competition or individual entries outside of your judging panel.**

Critical Timeline

- **Mid to late September** - ALL judges will be contacted to fill out and submit the Judges Information Form. For Best Crime Novel judges, the first box of books can be sent as early as **October**. (This is the largest category of entries, so a head start is useful.) If a large enough number of books arrive in any of the other categories those judges will be notified by the Awards Manager of an early shipment.
- **October 15** –Deadline for the Unpublished award; first-round submission packages are processed for transmission to that category’s judges in the following weeks.
- **December 15** - Entries for the **published** categories must be postmarked or courier-dated by December 15.
- **Throughout November, December and January**, the published books and stories will be processed and shipped to the judges for all categories except Unpublished.
- **January 15** – target date for Unpublished longlist entrants to be notified.
- **April 1** - **Deadline for all juries to determine their shortlist.** Completed Shortlist Reporting Forms should be received by the Awards Manager. If your category winner is already determined, the Winner Reporting Form may also be completed and sent.
- **TBD** - **the shortlists are publicly announced.** Tickets for the Awards Gala go on sale the next day (if there is a Gala).
- **May 1** -**Deadline for all juries to send their Winner Reporting Form to the Awards Manager.**
- **TBA** - **Winners announced at the Awards Gala (or other public means ie social media)**

Communication

For all concerns regarding the judging process and the delivery of submissions contact:

Awards Manager: Ludvica Boota, awards@crimewriterscanada.com

Other Contacts:

CWC Executive Director: ed@crimewriterscanada.com

Board and Awards Committee Chair: Hyacinthe Miller, board-chair@crimewriterscanada.com

Judge Information Form

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|-------------------------|--|
| Judging Category | |
| First Name | |
| Last name | |
| City/town | |
| Province | |
| Telephone number | |
| e-mail | |

NOTE: All entries will be in pdf form for the 2024 awards. Prior to starting judging, we ask that you download the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader or whatever application you prefer to use when reading PDFs. If anyone requires additional consideration for accessibility needs, please contact the Awards Manager as soon as possible.

Published Shortlist Reporting Form

DUE: April 1

Judging Category _____

| | Author Name (First Last) | Title | Publisher |
|----------|-------------------------------------|--------------|------------------|
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| 2 | | | |
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Published Winner Reporting Form

In addition to the winner's name and book title, we also need a brief blurb (150 to 200 words) explaining your jury's reasoning for choosing the winner. How you produce this blurb is up to you, but we need one blurb that should reflect the thinking of all three judges.

DUE: May 1

Winner: Name (First Last), Title, Publisher

Blurb (150 to 200 words):

Scorecard for Published Fiction – AVAILABLE IN EXCEL

*This is an **optional** tool that can be used as a guide for judging.

Title:

Score 1-5
(1 low; 5 high)

- Do the opening pages pull you into the story?
- Does the writing compel you to keep reading?
- Does the premise have something that makes it fresh?
- Is the pace working for the story?
- Does the setting give a sense of time and place and does it fit the tone of the story?
- Is the dialogue purposeful, plausible, free from info-dumping, and is it clear who's speaking?
- Are the characters compelling and are their actions and reactions believable?
- Is the POV clear at all times?
- Does the book fulfill the expectations of the reader?
- Does the book have that "spark" that makes it memorable (in a good way)?

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Total

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| Judge's Overall Comments: |
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Scorecard for Published Nonfiction - AVAILABLE IN EXCEL

*This is an **optional** tool that can be used as a guide for judging.

Title:

Score 1-5
(1 low; 5 high)

- Do the opening pages pull you into the book?
- Does the writing compel you to keep reading?
- Does the premise have something that makes it fresh?
- Are there sufficient & reputable references for the facts?
- Does the book fulfill the expectations of the reader?
- Does the book have that "spark" that makes it memorable (in a good way)?

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Total

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| Judge's Overall Comments: |
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