

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.**
2. *Shortlist Reporting Form* – One (1) copy is to be completed for each category and submitted to the Awards Manager by **April 1**
3. *Winner reporting Form* - One (1) copy is to be completed for each category and submitted to the Awards Manager by **May 1**

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 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 the person 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, and terrorism. In the nonfiction category, economic crimes, fraud, conspiracy (real or alleged), and the like are just as likely to be addressed 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 does, however, have to 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 or a cozy.

NOTE: 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.

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 the readers 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)?

Other considerations for specific categories

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
 - novellas written for reluctant readers, ESL students, or people who want a short quick read; these books have no subplots and the vocabulary and writing are uncomplicated; these novellas are often called rapid reads, easy reads, or similar terms;

- traditional novellas (works longer than short stories but shorter than novels), which can incorporate subplots and more complex and sophisticated language and writing style.
- When reading these novella submissions, please bear in mind who the audience is for the book and judge the novella accordingly (i.e., is it written appropriately for the audience it's intended for).

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?

Juvenile/YA

- Are the story and writing style appropriate to the reading level that 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 material and writing.

French

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

Howard Engel Award for Best Crime Novel Set in Canada

- Majority of the work (60% or greater) must be set in any part of Canada.
- If you are not sure about the setting qualifies, please contact the Awards Manager.

Working as a Judging Team

Judges should read the books, applying 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 come up with 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 fellow judges.

Communication is important. Previous judges have found that the give-and-take between the judges is one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of being an awards judge. Discussion can take place via video conferencing (CWC can set this up if needed), phone or email so long as it works for all team members.

Once the three judges agree with the five finalists, one judge needs to fill out the Shortlist Form and send the agreed-upon shortlist to the Awards Manager by April 1st.

NOTES: Five finalists must be selected for the shortlist. If your category has less than 10 entries you will be given special instructions.

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

Continue the process to determine the winner. At that time, the Winner Form is filled out and sent to the Award Manager on or before May 1st.

In addition to the winner's name and book, 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 the team but we need one blurb that should reflect the thinking of all three judges. The presenter for each category will read the blurb at the Awards Gala as the winner comes up to receive his or her award. **We need the blurb on or before May 1.**

Important Points

- 1. Judges are not to post reviews on social media on 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.**

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.
- **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.
- **April 1 is the deadline for all juries to determine their shortlist**. All completed Shortlist Reporting Forms should be sent to the Awards Manager to be compiled. If the winner is already determined, the Winner Reporting Form may also be completed and sent as well.
- **April 21, 2021, the shortlists are announced**. Tickets for the Awards Gala go on sale the next day.
- **May 1 is the deadline for the juries to declare their winner and a summary of why the winner was chosen**. Fill out the Winner Reporting Form and send it to the Awards Manager.
- **May 27, 2021, is the date of the Awards Gala**.

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: Alison Bruce, ed@crimewriterscanada.com

Board and Awards Committee Chair: Judy Penz Sheluk, chair@crimewriterscanada.com

Judges Information Form

Judging Category	
First Name	
Last name	
Business Name (If applicable)	
Address	
City/town	
Province	
Postal Code	
Telephone number	
e-mail	
Shipment notes (e.g.: leave with doorman, leave on porch, beware of Dog, etc.)	

Vacation: Aside from the Best Novel category, ALL shipments will begin at the end of December through to the beginning of January. If you know you will be away during this time and will not be available to receive a shipment, please list the dates below OR e-mail the Awards Manager once your plans have been finalized.

Published Shortlist Reporting Form

DUE: April 1

	Author Name (First Last)	Title	Publisher
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Published Winner Reporting Form

In addition to the winner's name and book, 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 Nonfiction

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 and 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)?

Total

Judge's Overall Comments: