

## Juror Guidelines

### Published Categories

*For Confirmed Jurors Only*

The juror guidelines cover three aspects of judging:

1. What to look for when evaluating the quality of this year's submissions,
2. What the eligibility rules are for your category's books and their authors, and
3. How to work with fellow jurors to agree on a shortlist and winner.

At the end of this document, you will find the following forms to be filled out by your jury:

1. *Shortlist Reporting Form* – One (1) copy PER JURY is to be completed for your category and returned to the Awards Manager by **April 1**. *(If a jury is unable to reach an agreement on a shortlist by email or online meeting, inform the awards manager **immediately**).*
2. *Winner reporting Form* - One (1) copy PER JURY is to be completed for your category and submitted to the Awards Manager by **May 1**, along with a 3-5 sentence paragraph about why this book was chosen.

**NOTE: All entries will be in pdf form for the 2026 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.**

## 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 a major subgenre within crime fiction, but they are by no means the only one. **Regardless of your personal preference for or against a particular subgenre, you are expected to evaluate all entries without bias.**

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 is to solve the crime, prevent the crime, perpetrate the crime, punish the criminal, 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

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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 might even see 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 work entered by an author this year to a work of theirs that was previously published. **Only compare the work to other works submitted in this category this year.***

*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 its opening pages make 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 through their motivations and actions?
- Is the puzzle or central problem of the book interesting and challenging?
- Is there internal logic/consistency and believability to all elements (plot, characters, dialogue, facts, etc.)? 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 AGAINST ONLINE LISTINGS TO ENSURE THE NOVEL IS ELIGIBLE. COPYRIGHT DATE SHOULD BE 2025.** 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 suspect the short story or 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.
  - 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's characters, language, themes, events, and writing style appropriate to the age and reading level the book is aimed at?
- This category is open to juvenile and picture books, young adult novels and novellas, and nonfiction for any of those audiences. While it can be challenging to weigh a picture book against a

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young adult thriller, please evaluate each entry according to how well it works for its intended audience.

### **French**

- Although most entries in this category will be adult fiction, it is a catch-all: fiction and nonfiction, adult and juvenile/YA. Your criteria is whether an entry effectively reaches its target audience.

### **Best Crime Novel Set in Canada (formerly the Howard Engel Award)**

- 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 some part(s) 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.

### **Eligibility of an Entry:**

It will have been first published in 2025 and be widely available in Canada whether in print or ebook or both. Publishers choose the category to enter; if your evaluation suggests it doesn't belong there, you may down-rate the entry accordingly. It will not be moved to another category.

### **Eligibility of an Author:**

- A. Any Canadian citizen or permanent resident regardless of their place of residence may enter their work into the Crime Writers of Canada Awards of Excellence.
- B. Any volunteer, board member, or staff member of Crime Writers of Canada meeting requirement A. above may enter their work, providing they have no knowledge of nor access to the names, locations, contact information of jurors who will be evaluating the category their work is entered in
- C. No volunteer, board member, or staff member who has such access to their juror information, or who might be in a position to gain such access before the finalists and winners are selected, may enter their work in that year's awards process.
- D. In the event that a work written by an eligible volunteer, board member, or staff member is raised to the Award Committee or Board for adjudication of any related issue, that author will recuse themselves from participation in the discussions both directly and indirectly, and will not discuss the matter publicly/on social media until after the award winners have been publicly announced.

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### Working as a Jury

Good communication among the jury members is essential. This is a collaboration between peers, not a struggle for dominance. Discussion can begin with group emails introducing yourselves and your relevant experience, then discussing how to proceed. You might agree up front on dates to exchange your top-10 lists and how to eliminate any consensus non-contenders for the shortlist. Tell your fellow jurors of dates when you will or will not be available for phone or video meetings (organized by CWC) to narrow down the jury shortlist. Many jurors find the discussion both enlightening and enjoyable as it brings up aspects of each book (both positive and negative) that they may not have considered.

### Crafting the Shortlist:

Jurors commit to reading the books and applying the included guidelines as well as whatever specific evaluation tools their experience brings to the process. 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 quarter (1/4) 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 quarter (1/4).

Each juror is responsible to prepare a personal long list of up to 10 titles (maybe fewer in small categories like French and Nonfiction – the Awards Manager will advise), in order of preference, to be circulated to fellow jurors in advance of the group discussion.

**If a book you did not finish appears on another juror's personal long list, please give the book another look and prepare your considered opinion either for or against inclusion in advance of the shortlist discussion.**

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

*NOTE 1 - Five finalists must be selected for the shortlist unless your category has less than 10 entries. In that case, you will receive special instructions from the Awards Manager.*

*NOTE 2 - While every effort should be made to avoid ties, it is sometimes impossible for a jury to select between two equally impressive books for a shortlist placement. In that case, please consult the Awards Manager immediately.*

### Selecting a Winner:

**All jurors should have read each of the shortlisted books in their entirety before a winner is determined.**

If a winner is not reached by consensus at the shortlist discussion, please continue to engage with your fellow jurors by email or a second discussion meeting to determine the winner. At that time, one juror should fill out the Winner Form and send it to the Award Manager **on or before May 1**.

**If the jurors cannot reach an agreement on a winner at their final meeting, contact the Awards Manager immediately. Each juror should then fill out their own Shortlist Form, ranked in order of preference, and send it to the Awards Manager for compilation into**

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**an overall ranking.**

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 jurors. The blurb will be adapted for media/social media release and read at the Awards Gala when the winner receives their award.

**We need the blurb on or before May 1.**

### Important Points

- 1. Jurors may not reveal that they are jurors, or the category they are involved with, until after the awards are publicly announced in May 2026.**
- 2. Jurors may not post reviews or comments on social media about books submitted in the category they are judging, until the awards are publicly announced.**
- 3. No author or character should be dismissed because of gender, culture, religion, or origin.**
- 4. No juror should exert undue pressure on the other jurors. If any juror feels such pressure, email the Awards Manager.**
- 5. To ensure the integrity of the selection process, do not discuss the competition or individual entries outside of your jury.**

### Conflict of interest:

**A juror may not serve if they are related by family or marriage to any of the people submitting work in that category.**

**A juror also may not serve if he or she has had professional involvement with the submitted work (e.g. edited it, designed it, or worked for the press that published it).**

**Jurors will be asked about conflicts of interest but may not know all the works submitted until they receive them, in which case they will immediately advise the Awards Manager. The Awards Committee will be the final arbiter with respect to if a conflict exists that will require removal of the juror**

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

**Awards Manager: Ludvica Boota, [awards@crimewriterscanada.com](mailto:awards@crimewriterscanada.com)**

### *Other Contacts:*

**CWC Executive Director: [ed@crimewriterscanada.com](mailto:ed@crimewriterscanada.com)**

**CWC Awards Jury Selection Chair: [awardsjudging@crimewriterscanada.com](mailto:awardsjudging@crimewriterscanada.com)**

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### 2026 Awards Timeline for Jurors

We've put together this timeline to help you navigate the key dates for this year's book awards.

- **October 1, 2025:** Submissions open to the public.
- **November 15–20, 2025:** You will receive access to the Dropbox folder containing the submitted books. The Awards Manager will email you as new books are uploaded.
- **December 15, 2025:** Submissions close. A final upload of books will be completed this week, and the Awards Manager will notify you of the final titles and total number of submissions.
- **January – March 2026:** This is your reading period. Please work with your panel to determine the shortlist and the winner.
- **April 1, 2026:** Deadline for all juror panels to submit their 5-book shortlist. The shortlist should be submitted using the shortlist reporting form and emailed to the Awards Manager. If you anticipate a delay, please contact the Awards Manager as soon as possible.
- **April 24, 2026:** The shortlists are officially announced.
- **May 1, 2026:** Deadline for all juror panels to submit their category winner along with the 150-200-word blurb. This should be submitted using the winner reporting form and emailed to the Awards Manager. If you anticipate a delay, please contact the Awards Manager as soon as possible.
- **May 29, 2026:** The winners are announced.

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# Published Category Shortlist Reporting Form

**CATEGORY:**

	<b>Author Name (First Last)</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Publisher</b>
<b>1</b>			
<b>2</b>			
<b>3</b>			
<b>4</b>			
<b>5</b>			



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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 jurors.

**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)?


**Total**

Juror'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)?


Total

Juror's Overall Comments: