



Criteria for Judging Fiction

"Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree."
-Ezra Pound

"That is part of the beauty of all literature. You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong."
- F. Scott Fitzgerald

These categories and levels provide a consistent measurement scale for evaluating entries. Judges are encouraged to add notes for writers, with suggestions and reactions to the material which will help writers understand their scores and improve.

	Exceeds Standards	Meets Average Standards	Below Standards
Characterization Worth 30 points	Develops unforgettable complex characters through dialogue, narration, and action. The writer might achieve the realism by giving the characters goals and obstacles, by creating a combination of strengths and flaws, by contrast with other characters, by imagining a past, or through physical traits. (23-30 points)	Creates characters through dialogue, narration, and action. Characters might not be as vibrant because they do not face significant choices or conflicts that draw out strong responses. (11-22 points)	The reader might not care about the characters because they are undeveloped. (0-10 points)
Structure and Plot Worth 30 points	The author expertly guides readers through the plot to a powerful resolution. The ending might offer a perfect balance of surprising yet inevitable. (The reader never sees the end coming, but once it does, they realize they should have seen it all along.) Advanced authors might experiment with non-chronological structure. Overall, the suspenseful plot drives readers to keep turning pages. (23-30 points)	The story's structure flows smoothly and the reader is never unpleasantly surprised or confused. The writer establishes a plot based on tension and problems needing resolution. (11-22 points)	The piece is unorganized and the characters do not face significant conflicts or obstacles. Readers may find some aspects confusing or unrealistic. (0-10 points)

	Exceeds Standards	Meets Average Standards	Below Standards
Style and Language Use Worth 30 points	<p>The story shows creative, concrete language; uses literary devices in a fresh way; and provides rich sensory detail. Writer uses vivid words and phrases that paint a picture in the reader's mind. Writer chooses precise words, varies sentence structures and lengths, and creates an effective tone.</p> <p>(23-30 points)</p>	<p>Writing shows correct word choices, varied sentences, and mostly concise prose. While correct, the style might lack the precision and panache of a more advanced writer.</p> <p>(11-22 points)</p>	<p>Limited word choices and mostly simple sentences. Prose might be too wordy. Emotions might be presented in a jarring or confusing way that alienates the reader.</p> <p>(0-10 points)</p>
Discretionary Points Worth 10 points	<p>Reader wants to read the piece several times. The writing vibrates with an energy that can't be forgotten or ignored. The piece leaves the reader feeling that they have been immersed in another world and have come out enriched.</p> <p>(7-10 points)</p>	<p>Reading the piece is a good experience, but the work shows some unevenness in presentation. Demonstrates good word choice, organization, and characters, but might sometimes feel confusing or might not always engage the reader.</p> <p>(4-6 points)</p>	<p>Errors make the work difficult to understand or distract the reader from the message. The author might still be in the learning stages of how to guide a reader through a story.</p> <p>(0-3 points)</p>

Judges will provide comments including their reactions to the material, with positive feedback and suggestions for improvement. These comments might include how they responded to the work: emotional or intellectual response while reading; places where they were most interested or least engaged; parts that confused them; or sections or ideas that piqued their curiosity or where they would have liked to have read more.