

# Fiction Feedback



editorial consultancy

## How to Win Writing Competitions

### *Why enter competitions?*

- Kudos
  - Get known and attract attention from the publishing world
  - Money
  - Confidence – the best reason of all. Just getting a story to a stage where you can enter a competition is a huge boost to a writer's confidence, even if it doesn't get placed.
1. Follow the rules. Sounds simple, but so many good writers disqualify their entries by exceeding the word limit or forgetting to take their name off the manuscript. This is the easy bit, so do yourself a favour, read the rules thoroughly and get this right.
  2. Be original. Come up with something that's going to make your entry memorable. This could be an unusual setting of time or place. Or a stand-out character: I once read a winning story written from the viewpoints of Siamese twins: I've never forgotten it.
  3. If there is a theme, avoid obvious interpretations. Sometimes it's the entries where the reference is more tangential that win, rather than those that address the theme head-on.
  4. But whatever you do, don't forget the theme. In writing competitions I've managed over the years, some excellent entries have been marked down and so not made the shortlist because the theme is too tenuous. Themed competitions will always have 'how well does it match the theme?' as a criterion.
  5. It's handy to find out what the other criteria are. Characterisation is likely to be one. To get this right, consider how you can point up character, using dialogue and description. In a short story, don't make this hard by introducing too many characters.
  6. Another criterion will be quality of prose. More than one or two typos and you're up against entries which are perfect. Do more than spell-check; get someone expert to read it thoroughly. Punctuation around dialogue causes most problems: learn the rules.
  7. Engage the emotions. That's what we all want in a story. How? Make us care about the characters, stoke our interest in a situation and use a writing style that involves.

8. Make sure things have changed at the end from where they were in the beginning. Something needs to happen!
9. Don't send a significantly shorter entry than the maximum word count. The more words, the more potential for a satisfying story, so give yourself that advantage.
10. Find an interesting title. Don't just use the theme; it irritates judges as it's easily confused with all the others and it won't be memorable. Remember Tip 2.

Good luck!

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