



**EXTENDED DEADLINE:**  
JUNE 15, 2026

95<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL

# WRITING COMPETITION



**COMPETITION  
PROSPECTUS**

# WRITER'S DIGEST

## EXTENDED DEADLINE: 6/15/2026

Writer's Digest's oldest and most popular competition, the Annual Writing Competition, is open for entries! Winners of the 95th Annual competition will be announced in the Nov/Dec 2026 issue of Writer's Digest.

## THE PRIZES

### ONE GRAND PRIZE WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

- \$5,000 in cash
- A paid trip to the Writer's Digest Annual Conference, including a trophy presentation at the keynote
- A coveted pitch opportunity where the winner will receive one-on-one attention from editors or agents
- Publication of their winning piece on WritersDigest.com

The **First-place** winner in each category will receive \$1,000 in cash.

The **Second-place** winner in each category will receive \$500 cash.

The **Third-place** winner in each category will receive \$250 in cash.

The **Fourth-place** winner in each category will receive \$100 in cash.

The **Fifth-place** winner in each category will receive \$50 in cash.

The **Sixth through Tenth place** winners in each category will receive a \$25 gift certificate for writersdigestshop.com.

### All top winners will also receive:

- Their names and the title of their winning piece listed in *Writer's Digest* and on WritersDigest.com
- A one-year subscription (new or renewal) to *Writer's Digest* magazine
- A one-year subscription to Writer's Digest Tutorials
- 20% discount off purchases made at Writer's Digest University
- A special graphic recognizing their winning status

### All Honorable Mentions receive:

- Their names and the title of their winning piece listed on WritersDigest.com
- 20% discount off purchases made at Writer's Digest University
- A special graphic recognizing their winning status

## THE PARTICULARS

Everything you'll need to know has been assembled in an easy-to-follow PDF. Inside you will find:

- PRIZES
- DEADLINES, PRICING AND NOTIFICATION
- RULES AND GUIDELINES
- PREPARING YOUR ENTRY
- HOW TO ENTER
- FAQ's
- COMPETITION SEASON PLANNER



WD's writing competitions recognize writing excellence on a global scale for over 90 years! Enter the Writer's Digest Annual Writing Competition for your chance to win! See below for pricing and deadline information. All entry fees are due in U.S. Dollars. Entry fees can be paid online by credit card/debit card (MC, V, AMEX & DISC) or PayPal.

### MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

#### **Early-Bird Deadline\*: May 4, 2026**

Poetry entry—\$20 for the first entry; \$15 for each additional\*\* poetry entry.

Manuscript entry—\$30 for the first entry; \$25 for each additional\* manuscript entry.

#### **Regular Deadline\*: June 1, 2026**

Poetry entry—\$25 for the first entry; \$20 for each additional\*\* poetry entry.

Manuscript entry—\$35 for the first entry; \$30 for each additional\* manuscript entry.

#### **Extended Deadline\*: June 15, 2026**

Poetry entry—\$25 for the first entry; \$20 for each additional\*\* poetry entry.

Manuscript entry—\$35 for the first entry; \$30 for each additional\* manuscript entry

*\*All deadlines are at 11:59 PM EST, on the specified date.*

*\*\*Additional entry discounts only apply after submitting and checking out your first entry. All deadlines are at 11:59 PM EST, on the specified date. All payments must be submitted at the time of entry.*

**Top Award Winners will be notified before October 15, 2026.** The top 10 winners in each category will be listed in the November/December 2026 issue of *Writer's Digest*. All winners' names will be listed on [www.writersdigest.com](http://www.writersdigest.com) after the December issue is published. Prizes will be distributed by November 11, 2026.



### RULES AND GUIDELINES

- All entries must be submitted online. Entries must be accompanied by the required entry fee by credit/debit card or PayPal. All entries must be in English. Only original works that have not been published (at the time of submission) in print, digital or online publications will be considered. Self-published work in blogs, on social media, etc. will be considered. Entries in the Nonfiction Essay or Article category may be previously published. Any AI-generated or AI-assisted work will NOT be considered. See our AI policy <https://www.writersdigest.com/writers-digest-ai-policy>.
- All submissions are final. Refunds are not provided for disqualified, withdrawn or non-winning entries. Once a submission has been checked out, it is entered into the competition and cannot be edited or replaced.
- If the Grand Prize Winner accepts the Writer's Digest Conference portion of their prize they must agree to travel (flying round-trip from the same city) during the conference dates in 2027. The editors or agents who meet with the Grand Prize Winner are under no obligation to read, buy, or represent the Grand Prize Winner's work. This prize includes airfare, hotel, and conference registration.
- Winners must fill out and submit the appropriate tax-related forms in order to receive their cash awards. If the forms are not submitted within 60 days of the request date, cash awards may be forfeited.
- Writer's Digest retains one-time nonexclusive publication rights to the Grand Prize and top winning entries to be published in a Writer's Digest publication.
- Check your spelling carefully including all login information, email addresses, etc. Incorrect email addresses may result in the transmission of important information being delayed and/or unsuccessful. Be sure that our email addresses (Writer's Digest and Submittable) are not blocked, or you may not receive critical information, receipts, confirmations, etc. Check your SPAM folder for any expected but unaccounted for email communications.
- The following are not permitted to enter the contest, neither under their legal names nor pen names: employees of Active Interest Media and their immediate family members; Writer's Digest Books authors; Writer's Digest contributing editors and columnists; and Writer's Digest instructors for online courses and live webinars. Grand Prize Winners from the previous three years are not eligible. Ineligible entries will be disqualified.
- Writer's Digest assumes all entries are original and are the works and property of the entrant, with all rights granted therein.
- Writer's Digest is not liable for any copyright infringement on the part of the entrant and will not become involved in copyright disputes.
- Writer's Digest reserves the right to reject work deemed unsuitable for publication or that does not meet all named criteria.
- Winner Notification dates refer to the date that all winners will be notified. Entrants not selected as winners will not be notified at this time.
- Non-winning submissions will receive a competition status update in the weeks following the notification of winners.
- WD writing competitions are open to U.S. and non-U.S. residents; however, due to U.S. Government restrictions, we are unable to accept entries from Syria, Iran, North Korea, or Crimea.



### PREPARING YOUR ENTRY

**WD's writing competitions recognizes writing excellence on a global scale. See below for information on preparing your entry.**

- All entries must be submitted online through Submittable. If you already have a Submittable account, simply log in! There is no cap as to the number of submissions that can be entered into the competition overall, however each submission (including edited versions being re-submitted) must be checked out separately.
- Please be sure that the email address that you provide will be valid throughout the competition. Competition related updates and winner notifications are sent via email. Please type carefully and list only one email address. Check your spelling carefully including all login information, email addresses etc. Incorrect email addresses may result in the transmission of important information being delayed and/or unsuccessful. Be sure that our email addresses (Writer's Digest and Submittable) are not blocked, or you may not receive critical information, receipts, confirmations etc. Check your SPAM folder for any expected but unaccounted for email communications.
- Cover pages are optional; they are not requested or necessary.
- Please submit text only; illustrations are not accepted. We recommend that you select a font which is easy to read; please do not use a decorative or script font. 12-point type size is preferred but not mandatory. We have no requirements as to the number of words per page. We have no rules or requirements regarding subject matter or language etc.
- It is preferred that an entry be formatted to 8.5 x 11 paper, single sided, 1-inch margins. We prefer any of the various standard-formatting styles (although non-conforming entries will not be disqualified). Poems may be either double-or single-spaced; all other documents must be double-spaced.
- Contact information is collected via the online entry form. You should not include this information on the file being uploaded. Only the category, word/line count and entry title should be included on the file being uploaded.
- Word counts are not to include entry title. All words (no matter the length) are to be included in the word count.
- For poetry entries, supply a line count instead of a word count. Line counts should include all lines that have text; do not include blank stanzas in your line count.
- When filling out the online submission form, you will be asked to upload your entry file. Accepted file formats include: .doc, .docx, and .pdf. Do not attach zipped files, or documents stored on the web like Google doc's etc . Please name your file the same as your submission title if possible; identifying information should not be included in your file name.



### ENTERING IS EASY!

Create your free Submittable account by clicking the *SUBMIT* button. If you already have a Submittable account, simply log in!

*\*NEW\* You can now compete in multiple WD competitions with a single login! Check back often for an updated list of competitions.*

When you are ready to submit your work to the **WD Annual Writing Competition** readers, you'll want to have the following information available:

- ✓ **Your contact information** (*be careful that the information provided is accurate*). Contact information is to be provided *only* on the submission form (not on the submission's file upload). Time sensitive information such as credits and contact information (for prize distribution) is taken directly from the submission form. Due to the nature of deadlines, corrections to this information are not guaranteed.
- ✓ **Your submission (story/poem) file** (*see the PREPARING YOUR ENTRY tips for more information*).
- ✓ **Your method of payment** (*see the ENTRY PRICING, SUBMISSION DEADLINES AND WINNER NOTIFICATION page for tips for all pricing and deadlines*).

Ready to enter? Paste the following link <https://www.writersdigest.com/writers-digest-competitions/annual-writing-competition> into your browser and follow the 'CLICK HERE TO SUBMIT' button!

Submission confirmations , along with any correspondence from WD in respect to a submission, will be done though Submittable. Check your Submittable account dashboard for messages.



## CATEGORY SELECTION AND LINE/PAGE/WORD COUNT REQUIREMENTS

## Category Selection

From the categories offered, select the category that best represents your entry. If the judges feel that another category is more appropriate, we will switch the category for you, on your behalf.

•**Genre Short Story (Mystery, Romance, etc.):** Stories that fit into a specific classification such as mystery, romance, science fiction, horror or fantasy.

•**Mainstream/Literary Short Story:** Serious, non-formulaic fiction that does not fit into a genre. For the sake of separating them entirely from genre fiction, are combined into their own category.

Literary fiction is generally more concerned with style and characterization and may be paced more slowly than commercial fiction. It usually centers on a timeless, complex theme. Mainstream fiction is usually faster paced, with a stronger plot line (and more events and/or higher stakes). Characterization may not be as central to the story and the theme may be more obvious than literary fiction.

The category of both two indicates that the story would generally appeal to a larger audience and isn't confined by the rules and structure you might see in a typical genre.

•**Memoirs/Personal Essay:** This is an article that is distinguished by and draws its power from its personal viewpoint. In such pieces, the author examines an issue, event, experience, place or idea and offers an opinion or some other reaction to it. The goal of an essay may be to explain, justify or persuade. The last is most often the goal of newspaper op-ed essays. Examples of other types of essays may be found in such magazine columns as Redbook's "A Young Mother's Story" or New York Times "Modern Love" column. Memoirs or personal essays that are distinctly religious or spiritual in nature should be submitted to the "Inspirational" category.

•**Nonfiction Essay/Article:** This is an article in which the writer has researched a topic and explains the topic to readers. It can also profile an individual, a place or a topic. Often there is a "service" angle—a clear benefit that readers can take away from the article. There are many types of articles: how-to articles, personality profiles, Q&A's, informational pieces, travel articles, magazine features, web articles, news articles. They may include events drawn from the author's personal experience, but these are not personal essays, and the focus of the article should clearly be on providing readers with information.

•**Inspirational/Spiritual:** An article, essay or story with an explicitly religious, spiritual or otherwise inspirational focus. An article that's suitable for Guideposts or St. Anthony Messenger, for example, would be inspirational. An essay on how the power of Christ, (or Buddha, or Allah or Vashti) touched your life would be inspirational. A story about the power of religion, the power of prayer, or the power of the universe would be inspirational.

•**Rhyming Poetry:** When the last word of some or all lines rhyme with each other. Ask yourself: What is the rhyme scheme of my poem? If you don't understand what that question means, your poem is probably non-rhyming. Most formal poetry is considered rhyming poetry (such as sonnets or ballads).

•**Non-rhyming poetry:** When there is no recognizable or purposeful rhyme scheme or structure. Free verse falls under this category.

•**Children's/Young Adult Fiction:** Fiction written for the children, adolescents, and young adults.

•**Humor:** This is an article/essay (or less commonly, a short story) that tells a humorous story which most likely happened to the author, however embellished it may be. While it may offer a similar insight on a topic as the memoir/personal essay category, it distinguishes itself by its tone and focus on humor. Think: essays by David Sedaris, Sloane Crosley, or Nora Ephron.

## Word Count / Line Count Requirements

Online Entry forms must have the word/line/page count listed where requested.

Count refers to all words making up the story (no matter the number of letters in the word). Do not count the title or contact information in the word count. Poetry entries: count the lines containing text. Do not count blank lines between stanzas & do not count the title or contact information.

•**Memoirs/Personal Essay, Nonfiction Essay/Article and Children's/Young Adult Fiction:** 2,000 words maximum.

•**Mainstream/Literary Short Story, Genre Short Story, and Humor:** 4,000 words maximum.

•**Inspirational Writing:** 2,500 words maximum.

•**Rhyming Poem and Non-rhyming Poem:** 40 lines maximum.



### ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS...

For all Writer's Digest Competition related questions and queries, please contact the WD Competitions team at: [writersdigestwritingcompetition@aimmedia.com](mailto:writersdigestwritingcompetition@aimmedia.com)

**Having troubles logging in?** For help, go to: <https://submittable.help/en/articles/923459-how-do-i-sign-in-to-my-submittable-account>

**Are there any restrictions as to the number of submissions, restrictions regarding content, language, subject matter etc.?** No, we do not have any restrictions or preferences. One entry (story, poem, etc.) per submission.

**Do you allow simultaneous submissions?** Yes, simultaneous submissions are certainly allowed. Simply inform us of acceptance elsewhere, if applicable.

**May I submit multiple submissions?** Yes, multiple submissions are allowed. Simply complete a new submission form for each submission.

**Is it okay to have illustration or pictures?** Please submit text only.

**How do I determine my word count?** Count all words (except the title) making up your story (no matter the number of letters in the word). Do not include the entry title in your count.

**What are your formatting requirements – any other tips?** To best present your work, we suggest that you select a font that is easy to read; 12-point type size is preferred but not mandatory. We have no requirements as to the number of words per page. It is preferred that an entry be formatted to or printed on 8.5 x 11 white paper, single sided, 1-inch margins. We prefer any standard-formatting styles (although non-conforming entries will not be disqualified).

**Are pen names allowed?** You may enter under a pen name. Include your pen name on all forms as you would wish for them to appear in any credits. Please be advised (and advise us of it if you are notified as a winner) that we only need your legal name if you are chosen as a winner (in order to issue prizes).

**What if I wanted to submit only part of my story into the competition (in order to stay within the maximum number of words for example)?**

If you submit a portion of a larger work, please understand that what you submit will be judged as a complete story, not part of a larger work. Your submission needs to read as a complete story in and of itself.

**What if I would like to edit or exchange an entry that I have already submitted? Edits must be done prior to entering.** Once an entry has been submitted, we do not accept edits, replacements or exchanges. If you wish to re-enter an edited piece, it is most acceptable and is considered a new entry. You may wish to slightly alter the entry title or the file name in these cases, so that you are able to identify the versions-should you be selected as a winner.

**Is there an age limit for entrants?** All contest entrants must be aged 18 years or older or over the age of majority in the jurisdiction in which they reside. Please refer to the terms upon submission.

**How do I submit my entry fees?** All entry fees are due in U.S. Dollars. Entry fees are to be paid online by credit card/debit card (MC, V, AMEX & DISC) or PayPal.

**Once the competition is over, will you return my entry?** Entries are not returned; please keep a copy for your records.

## WRITER'S DIGEST

Writer's Digest currently holds **six distinct competitions throughout a year!** Competitions offer a variety of prizes, criteria, judging panels, and accolades. We encourage entrants to not limit themselves to entering only one competition.

The list of competitions\* being held can be found at <https://www.writersdigest.com/wd-competitions>. The calendar at the end of this PDF provides all the deadlines.

Each competition listed below has its own individual set of guidelines, rules, prizes, submission instructions, submission fees, deadlines, judges etc. The dates, fees, rules, categories\* etc. are only available while the competition is live and is accepting entries. You may, however, look at the previous year's competition to get a sense of what to expect.

You may enter any competition, as many times as you would like! Please see competition rules and guidelines for more details.

*\*When looking at the guidelines, please note that competitions are different from categories.*

- [WRITER'S DIGEST ANNUAL WRITING COMPETITION](#) (9 CATEGORIES)
- [WRITER'S DIGEST POETRY AWARDS](#)
- [WRITER'S DIGEST PERSONAL ESSAY](#)
- [WRITER'S DIGEST SHORT STORY COMPETITION](#)
- [WRITER'S DIGEST SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK AWARDS](#) (7 CATEGORIES)
- [WRITER'S DIGEST SELF-PUBLISHED E-BOOK AWARDS](#) (8 CATEGORIES)



The *Writer's Digest* collection of competitions, all of which are held on a yearly basis, have long-standing respect within the writing community. Over 90 years ago, *Writer's Digest* launched its first writing competition. Today, *Writer's Digest* holds six competitions, with a combined twenty-eight categories. Honoring writers across a variety of genres and formats including short pieces (fiction and non-fiction), poetry, humor, articles (print or online), and self-published books, *Writer's Digest* has a competition to highlight your work. Winners are eligible for cash prizes, free trips to our ever-popular *Writer's Digest* Annual Writing Conference, promotion in our print magazine and website, and more.

We hope that you'll join us and share your work in any (better yet--all) of the competitions! Sharpen your pencils, sync your devices, and mark your calendars!

## WD ANNUAL WRITING COMPETITION

### Early-Bird Deadline: May 4, 2026

- Poetry entry—\$20 for the first entry; \$15 for each additional\* poetry entry.
- Manuscript entry—\$30 for the first entry; \$25 for each additional\* manuscript entry.

### Extended Deadline: June 15, 2026

- Poetry entry—\$25 for the first entry; \$20 for each additional\* poetry entry.
- Manuscript entry—\$35 for the first entry; \$30 for each additional\* manuscript entry.

## WD POETRY AWARDS

### Early-Bird Deadline: November 2, 2026

- First entry—\$20
- Each additional\* entry—\$15

### Regular Deadline: December 1, 2026

- First entry—\$25
- Each additional\* entry—\$20

## WD SELF-PUBLISHED BOOK AWARDS

### Early-Bird Deadline: 4/1/2026

- First entry—\$100
- Each additional\* entry—\$85

### Regular Deadline: 5/1/2026

- First entry—\$125
- Each additional\* entry—\$110

### Extended Deadline: 5/29/2026

- First entry—\$125
- Each additional\* entry—\$110

## WD PERSONAL ESSAY AWARDS

### Early-Bird Deadline: 9/1/2026

All entries—\$30

### Regular Deadline: 10/1/2026

All entries—\$35

## WD SHORT SHORT STORY COMPETITION

### Early-Bird Deadline: 11/16/26

All entries—\$30

### Regular Deadline: 12/15/26

All entries—\$35

## WD SELF-PUBLISHED E-BOOK AWARDS

### Early-Bird Deadline: 8/14/2026

- First entry—\$100
- Each additional\* entry—\$85

### Regular Deadline: 9/15/2026

- First entry—\$125
- Each additional\* entry—\$110