

7th Annual —
**Personal
Essay Awards**



EXTENDED DEADLINE | OCTOBER 15, 2026

WRITER'S DIGEST

DEADLINE: 10/15/26

We're looking for personal essays! Think you can write a winning essay in 2,000 words or fewer? Enter the Writer's Digest Personal Essay Awards for your chance to win! \$2,500 in cash, publication in Writer's Digest magazine, and a paid trip to our ever-popular Writer's Digest Conference!

THE PRIZES

ONE GRAND PRIZE WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

\$2,500 in cash

Their essay title published in Writer's Digest magazine's May/June 2027 issue

A paid trip to the Writer's Digest Annual Conference, including a coveted pitch opportunity where the winner will receive one-on-one attention from editors or agents

THE SECOND PLACE WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

\$1,000 in cash

Their essay title published in Writer's Digest magazine's May/June 2027 issue

THE THIRD PLACE WINNER WILL RECEIVE:

\$500 in cash

Their essay title published in Writer's Digest magazine's May/June 2027 issue

FOURTH THROUGH TENTH PLACE WINNERS WILL RECEIVE:

\$100 in cash

Their essay titles published in Writer's Digest magazine's May/June 2027 issue

ELEVENTH THROUGH TWENTY-FIFTH PLACE WINNERS WILL RECEIVE:

A \$50 gift certificate for writersdigestshop.com

THE PARTICULARS

Everything you'll need to know has been assembled in an easy-to-follow PDF prospectus.

- PRIZES
- DEADLINES, PRICING AND NOTIFICATION
- RULES AND GUIDELINES
- PREPARING YOUR ENTRY
- HOW TO ENTER
- FAQ's
- 2024-2025 COMPETITION PLANNER



Writer's Digest's writing competitions recognize writing excellence on a global scale for over 90 years! Enter the Writer's Digest Personal Essay Awards 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*: September 1, 2026

\$30 per entry

Regular Deadline*: October 1st, 2026

•\$35 per entry

Extended Deadline*: October 15, 2026

•\$35 per entry

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

Winners will be notified by December 31, 2026. Top winners will be listed in the Summer 2027 issue of Writer's Digest and at www.writersdigest.com after the Summer 2027 issue is published. 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.



Writer's Digest's writing competitions recognize writing excellence on a global scale for over 90 years! Enter the Writer's Digest Personal Essay Awards for your chance to win! Read our rules and guidelines below...

RULES AND GUIDELINES

- All entries must be submitted online. Entries must be accompanied by the required entry fee by credit card, debit card, or PayPal. Entry fees are non-refundable.
- 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. AI-generated or AI-assisted works are not eligible.
- Have your necessary information at hand when you are ready to submit your entry.
- Entries exceeding the 2,000 word limit will be disqualified. *Word count* refers to all words making up the story (no matter the number of letters in the word). Do not count the title in the word count.
- All submissions are final. Refunds are not provided for disqualified, withdrawn, or non-winning entries. Once a submission has been sent, it 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. 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. **Authors retain all ownership of their work.**
- 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.
- Entrants not selected as winners will not be individually notified; check the MESSAGES tab in Submittable for any related messaging in the weeks following notification.
- 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.



Writer's Digest's writing competitions recognize writing excellence on a global scale for over 90 years! Enter the Writer's Digest Personal Essay Awards for your chance to win! To get started submitting your work, see the helpful tips below...

PREPARING YOUR ENTRY

We're looking for personal essays! Think you can write a winning essay in 2,000 words or fewer? Here's how to get started...

- All entries must be submitted online through *Submittable*. If you already have a *Submittable* account, simply log in!
- Please be sure that the email address you provide will be valid throughout the competition span. Competition related updates and winner notifications are sent via email. Competition related updates and winner notifications are sent via email and/or the Submittable messaging feature. 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 as well as the *MESSAGES* tab within your Submittable account.
- Please submit text only; illustrations are not accepted. We recommend that you select a font that 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 as Letter, 8.5 x 11, single-sided, normal 1-inch margins. All documents must be double-spaced.
- The submission form collects your author information. The file name should not include any identifying information. We recommend that you avoid adding symbols/punctuation in file names of the document file which you are uploading. Files are not returned.
- Entries exceeding the word limit will be disqualified. *Word count* refers to all words making up the story (no matter the number of letters in the word). Do not count the title in the word count.
- When filling out the online submission form, you will be asked to upload your entry file. Acceptable file formats include .doc, .docx, .rtf and .pdf. Do not attach zipped files, or documents stored on the web like Google doc's etc. File types such as .wps, .pages, .abw and .scw will not be accepted. The file size should not exceed 5 MB. Please name your file the same as your submission title if possible.



Writer's Digest's writing competitions recognize writing excellence on a global scale for over 90 years! Here's how to Enter!

ENTERING IS EASY!

Create your free Submittable account by clicking the *SUBMIT* button at <https://www.writersdigest.com/writers-digest-competitions/personal-essay-awards>

If you already have a Submittable account, simply log in!

**NEW* You can now compete in multiple Writer's Digest competitions with a single login! Check back often for an updated list of competitions.*

When you are ready to submit your work to the **Writer's Digest Personal Essay Awards** 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 PERSONAL ESSAY AWARDS submission 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).*



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ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS...

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

Having trouble 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 regarding content, language, subject matter etc.? No, we do not have any restrictions or preferences.

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

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

Is it ok if my name appears within my personal essay? Yes. For the Personal Essay Awards, it is fine to have your name appear within the essay.

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 essay 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 to be 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.

How do I submit my entry fees? 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.

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 in 2026 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

**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.*