

# 2020 FAQs and Judging Criteria for Reviewers

1. **What were the story submission guidelines?** See guidelines on the website (<https://www.writemichigan.org/short-story-contest/>).
2. **What if I open the PDF and the story isn't complete or it's blank?** You can only rate them on what's there. This isn't a glitch in the contest software; it's how the person saved and submitted their PDF. **Please include a rating of 1 with "Blank story" in the comments section.**
3. **What if I see a name on the PDF?** Although we ask authors not to include their name on the PDF, this still occasionally happens, particularly with students submitting a story for a school assignment. We ask that you ignore the author's name and review the story as normal.
4. **What if I see copyrighted information from another work?** Please email [writemichigan@kdl.org](mailto:writemichigan@kdl.org) so we can flag it. Stories need to be original and should not quote other authors (whose work is not in the public domain). This has happened in the past; the stories will be disqualified.
5. **How do I know that this is an original work?** The Write Michigan committee puts all semifinalist stories through a plagiarism checker and a Google search. We have found stories this way in the past so we are confident that it works. You don't need to do this; we will take care of it.
6. **What if I know the person or recognize the story?** Just let us know at [writemichigan@kdl.org](mailto:writemichigan@kdl.org) so we can reassign the story.
7. **How do I rate them?** Reviewers in the past found it helpful to use the rating sheet (below) to individually rate the areas of the story and then to put an average score into the contest software. Use it if you wish. Some people like to print their stories out while other prefer to read online. Some people read them once and then rate them, while others read them first and then a second time before assigning a rating. Everyone is different.
8. **How will my comments be used?** Primarily any comments you include will help the Write Michigan committee determine the pool of semifinalists should there be a tie in the ratings. We also will share your comments with any authors that ask for them. You will remain anonymous to the authors but we feel that sharing comments would help authors improve their writing and ultimately support our writing communities.
9. **What if I can't get my stories done?** This happens to a few volunteers each year. Don't worry. Life happens. We just ask that you contact [writemichigan@kdl.org](mailto:writemichigan@kdl.org) and let us know a few weeks ahead of time so we can ask for help reviewing them from others!
10. **What if I didn't give any of my stories a 10?** Don't worry. Sometimes you may not end up with stories that are a 10. You didn't do anything wrong.
11. **What if a story is in Spanish and I can't read Spanish?** Only stories in the Spanish category should be written in Spanish. Please contact us at [writemichigan@kdl.org](mailto:writemichigan@kdl.org) and we'll unassign you that story and recategorize it.
12. **Can I see how other reviewers have rated a story?** Although this is a common request, we've consciously chosen to not allow you to see other reviewers' ratings and comments so that your review is uninfluenced by others' opinions.

# Judging Criteria—Round 1

Score	Criteria
	<p><b>Characterization</b></p> <p>Does the author create believable, memorable characters with the uniqueness, complexity, and individuality of real people? Do you respond to the characters either positive or negatively? Does the main character respond to and influence events? Does the dialogue contribute to rich, vivid, unique characterization?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The author fully and richly develops characters through description, dialogue, and action and does not rely on telling you about the character.</p> <p><b>5 points:</b> Characters are not deeply developed through detail or dialogue. At times the author reverts to “telling” you about the character as opposed to “showing” the character through detail, action and dialogue.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> Characters are undeveloped puppets going through the motions and either do not change or change without motivation. Some may be stereotypes and either all good or all bad.</p>
	<p><b>Plot</b></p> <p>Has the author constructed a clear, convincing and compelling storyline with a recognizable arc of conflict, crisis and resolution? Are obstacles to be overcome sufficiently challenging to the protagonists? Do you feel tension mounting in the story? Is the resolution innovative, credible and authentic?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The story contains enough creative development to maintain interest. Even with multiple story lines or plot twists, all pieces were woven together into a single whole.</p> <p><b>5 points:</b> The story is interesting and doesn’t feel contrived but lacks sufficient unique twists to lift it above the level of average.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> The storyline is either difficult to follow, or simplistic and predictable. Pacing is poor and the text is padded with irrelevant material.</p>
	<p><b>Theme</b></p> <p>Does the story contain a central or dominating theme? Does the author make this idea concrete through the characters and their actions? How well is the message integrated into the story? Is the story an agenda-driven platform?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The story’s message rises naturally out of the plot and characters. The message may be subtle or overt, but either way it is interwoven into the story so that neither plot nor characters nor theme could exist without the other.</p>

	<p><b>5 points:</b> The theme is present but not thoroughly integrated into the other elements of the story, such as plot and characters.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> After reading the story, you aren't sure what the author intended to communicate, or recognize a message that isn't consistent throughout.</p>
	<p><b>Setting and Atmosphere</b></p> <p>Are historical and geographic details sufficiently and accurately developed to give the story realistic or appropriate atmosphere and setting? Can you visualize the places being described? Does the story contain anachronisms?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The author vividly and accurately describes the setting so you are fully immersed in the time and place and action. The setting is an integral part of the story and contributes to the mood and emotions of the characters.</p> <p><b>5 points:</b> The story conveys an adequate sense of place, but the setting is not an integral part of the story. The setting could be changed without changing the story.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> The physical setting is seldom described so you have little sense of time and place. The story includes descriptions that are inaccurate in terms of time and place. Conversely, the author gives so much time and attention to setting that you lose track of the story in the detail.</p>
	<p><b>Mechanics</b></p> <p>Are there errors present in spelling, grammar, paragraphing, and punctuation? Are words used incorrectly? Do typographical errors mar your enjoyment of the story?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The vocabulary fits and enhances your understanding of each character, as well as the setting. Language and grammar are authentic. Reading the story is a pleasure.</p> <p><b>5 points:</b> Vocabulary is acceptable but does not serve to make the story unique. There are a few, but not many, errors.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> The story is poorly written with limited vocabulary. Words are overused or used incorrectly, making the story difficult to read. The story contains spelling, grammatical and/or typographical errors.</p>
	<p><b>Writing Quality</b></p> <p>Does the quality of the author's prose and deftness in handling point-of-view enhance the story? Do specific details appeal to your senses and hold your attention? Does the author use precise, active verbs? Does the rhythm of the prose enhance the meaning? Are metaphors and similes skillfully employed?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> The author uses language in a skillful manner to express the character, theme and setting. Attention to detail, precise word choices, the rhythm of the prose, use of the active voice, and original metaphors, similes and symbols all highlight the quality of writing.</p>

	<p><b>5 points:</b> The author adequately uses language, but the story is not marked by “prose that sings.” Metaphors and similes are not unique and well-placed. If symbolism is present, it is either heavy-handed or arbitrarily vested with meaning.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> The prose flows awkwardly. There is insufficient detail, excessive use of abstraction or use of the passive voice. Metaphors and similes are cliché. The perspective drifts or is marked by confusion.</p>
	<p><b>Passion</b></p> <p>Does this story engage your emotions? Have you come to care deeply about the characters and what happens to them? Is your mind and spirit stimulated and enlightened by the experience of reading this story?</p> <p><i>Sample scoring from a range of 1 to 10:</i></p> <p><b>10 points:</b> I will remember this story and these characters long after reading. The story resonates in ways that astonish me.</p> <p><b>5 points:</b> The story was okay. I chuckled in parts, or thought that certain scene was poignant, but overall probably won’t remember many details.</p> <p><b>1 point:</b> My emotional engagement with this story is irritation. I read it because I had to.</p>
<p><b>Average Total Score</b></p>	