

FACT SHEET NO. 8

HINTS TO WRITERS ON ENTERING A COMPETITION

1. Firstly read the conditions of entry several times and ensure you understand what is being asked. You don't want your entry disqualified for non-compliance.
2. Presentation can be important, dog-eared pages, poor layout, sloppy binding, handwritten amendments etc can be a deciding factor when a hard choice between finalists has to be made.
3. Presentation only needs to be neat not necessarily bound, unless rules say so, and you do not need to add pictures, drawings etc. Literary awards are judged on their literary merit not the artwork.
4. They say there are no new stories only new ways of telling them, ask yourself what is different about your story, what makes it stand out from the crowd? If you can't find something chances are neither will the judge.
5. Judges in unpublished manuscripts look for commercial viability, literary merit and a new angle. Would you buy this story or is it simply something you want to write about? If no one else wants to read it your message is lost so ask why would anyone want to read this? Then ensure you strengthen that reason so the reader gets it.
6. Don't waffle, be economic in your wording, seek out clumsy sentences, unnecessary repetition, superfluous words, inconsistencies of tense and overindulgence of pronouns. Best way is to read it out aloud and see how it flows off the tongue.
7. Don't dump huge pieces of information on to the reader; they simply divert the reader from the main story. Subtly feed that data to the reader through dialogue or through smaller dumps.
8. Proof read your story several times, at least two of these readings should be several weeks after you've written it. Have others read it and give you honest feedback. Take it to a workshop where an exchange of constructive criticism in a safe environment is offered. Never be afraid of criticism, without it you can never grow as a writer.
9. A great idea can be lost by a story or poem that starts well then peters out. If you cannot capture the reader's interest up front and retain it to the end your work will not succeed.
10. Editing: First drafts have no place in a contest, you are wasting your time and postage and a judges time in discarding it. If you have done the above thoroughly then you will craft your work into something worthwhile after six or seven drafts. Any less and you are fooling yourself.

These comments are taken from remarks made by judges of the FAW National Literary Awards over the years and form a consistent pattern of why the majority of manuscripts submitted fail to be short-listed.