

Guidance for entrants of The Original Writing and Illustration Awards Creative Writing Competitions

How can your entry stand out?

You need to **Interpret** 'Generation' **creatively** and to show independent thinking. What are some different meanings of 'Generation'? How could you surprise us? Suggestion: do a mind map with 'Generation' at the centre - what different ideas spin off from the word? What would be an **innovative, independent** approach to the word?

We recommend reading a range of **genres** first – get a sense of the **form** that you enjoy (e.g. epic poem; gothic fantasy; western?) and see how published writers approach the style. For example; what time era might you set your tale in? Could 'Generation' be taken into space, or some other surprising area?

Is there a preferred form or genre of writing?

No. You could write fiction or non-fiction; poetry or prose; gothic horror or sci-fi – yours is the choice!

This year, for the first time ever, we are also inviting you to **consider writing a non-fiction response**. You could look at a feature article about science, medicine, ecology, history... we do NOT want an essay but we are very interested to see skilled examples of **journalistic writing and reportage**. We'd advise you read a number of quality pieces of journalism first, get a sense for how an article is constructed, what different sections do – and how an issue can be created around a hook or piece of recent news. Writers as investigators!

If I write fiction, what should I keep in mind?

If you are sure you wish to write **fiction** - think about how to develop just a few (maybe only one) key **character/s**. Use dialogue, setting, reactions, complications, challenges to bring a character to life. Suggestion: try writing a list of different names/occupations/locations/random objects in different columns, then link one of each to create a mini plot; mix it up until you get ideas or combinations you like. Then start to create a backstory for that character. How much of that will we need to know? How can you suggest / reveal but without tell us directly?

Develop a **personal voice**: use scenes, dialogue, anecdotes you have experienced yourself – but **do something different** with it – give the reader something to interpret / think about for a rewarding read. Good writers are constantly listening/watching for new material. For example, you could keep a diary of things you noticed/heard across a week and think which you could use.

Be realistic about what you can achieve in 1,500 words. **Develop your skill in cutting and editing**. Good writers capture something special from seemingly small details others might overlook. Think about your **structure** – this does not have to be beginning/middle/end (some narratives are more satisfying if they break the rules) but think about **dramatic and thoughtful moments**, why they are there and what reaction you want from your reader? Suggestion: try doing a storyboard of key moments in your tale: how does the order of these help create drama or emotion?

From many years of the competition, we've put together some thoughts on what to do/avoid:

- Avoid action sequences, events & places you know little about (unless you do some research!)
- Keep dialogue real – would someone actually say that, then?
- If using your own experiences, make sure your writing style makes it engaging for your reader
- Leave your reader some work to do - don't over describe/don't tell them what to think, leave clues
- Keep characters' actions/reactions real - show how events have consequences (even if unintended)
- Avoid clichéd (often-covered) themes; try to say something of interest to others
- Avoid stories which are dreams or which end with the death of the storyteller (these are clichés)
- Don't use words to impress - weigh words carefully and be sure you know what they mean
- Think carefully about sentence construction - avoid awkward, overlong sentences
- Be sensitive with punctuation (not too many exclamation marks)
- Less is more: practice cutting/editing your own writing. Aim to be concise.
- Judges often select winning entries which are quirky, humorous, surprising, ironic and rise above the self.
- **Non-fiction**: make it 'newsworthy'; tell a story; consider balance; keep it engaging; what do we learn?