



# COMPETITION SUBMISSIONS BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES

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*Published March 2025*



Organisers who host competitions, prizes and awards use specific guidelines in order to handle submissions from authors. This guidance is intended to accompany the [Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values](#) which encourages the publishing industry to support a culture we can be proud of – one which is *'welcoming to all, respectful of all, and supportive of all'*.

*Note: we use 'author' to mean writer, illustrator, translator or other creator. When using 'competition' we are including all literary prizes and awards where authors are invited to enter works.*

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## A. Good practice for organisations hosting competitions

1. **The reward:** be clear about what the prize is if the submission is shortlisted or wins.
2. **Transparency:** specify who can make a submission (author, agent, publisher). In addition, provide clear information about who will be reading the work, and what they are looking for. External judges or assessors should, if practicable, be named.
3. **Translations:** if the competition is for a written work, clarify whether translations or illustrated works are accepted. If so, best practice would be – where appropriate – for the relevant translator or illustrator to be credited in any announcements about the competition; and we would expect them to receive a share of any prize monies.
4. **Manage expectations:** give a timeframe in which authors can expect to hear, updating this timeframe if necessary.

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5. **Rights:** simply entering the prize should not convey any rights, and if publication is part of the prize terms should be negotiated with the winner/s.
6. **Clear terms and conditions:** key information needs to be clear and prominent, not buried in lengthy terms & conditions where it can be too easily overlooked.
7. **Sponsorship:** where possible, provide clarity regarding the competition sponsors; what if any policies or requirements they might have which are not immediately clear; and what happens if the sponsorship is withdrawn.
8. **Fees:** In an ideal world, submission fees would not be charged but we recognise that this would not be viable for many organisations hosting competitions. If fees are charged, these need to be reasonable and we recommend that you offer clear and transparent information on why the fees are needed and how they will be used. You might want to consider a fee waiver for people who cannot afford it; or give contact information so that applicants can get in touch to discuss their personal circumstances.
9. **Extra costs:** we believe there should be no obligation on the author to take out a subscription, purchase books or pay other indirect charges as a condition of entering or winning the competition.
10. **Multiple submissions:** clarify whether you will accept multiple submissions from the author.
11. **Exclusivity:** clarify if the author is not permitted to send their submission to agents, publishers or enter the work for other competitions whilst it is being considered. If previously published works are not eligible, particularly where short works such as individual poems are concerned, explain exactly what any *not previously published* restrictions mean.
12. **Clear communication:** inform the author if the competition is unexpectedly closed. In such event, authors should be refunded any payment within a reasonable timeframe.
13. **Confidentiality:** be clear if confidentiality is required from successful authors until all rejections have been sent out or the results of the competition announced.
14. **Provide an outcome in a timely manner:** send rejections as swiftly as possible. These should be worded with compassion and professionalism while being clear and direct.

## **Dignity, respect and professionalism**

When setting up a submissions process:

15. **Consider best practice in relation to accessibility:** this means considering whether you can receive submissions in alternative formats and offer access assistance up front.

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Further help and advice is available here: [a guide to alternative formats for accessibility - Scope for business.](#)

16. **Provide clear up-to-date submissions guidance:** give as much information as possible – for instance, specify if you only accept digital submissions. If you accept originals, be clear about whether, and how, they will be returned. Time is valuable, only ask for as much information as is necessary to allow you to judge the submission.
17. **Transparency:** where possible, provide information about who will be reading the work. If using AI to filter submissions or for other purposes, you should give a guarantee that there will be human oversight, the final decision lies with a human, and that AI will not be used in a way that infringes the author's rights. The work and the author's identity should not be accessible by generative AI at any time without their consent. If authors have concerns about the possible involvement of AI, clarify how they should raise those concerns.
18. **Clear communication:** confirmation that entries are received is important. Consider whether you can implement an automated response acknowledging receipt, or whether a [query tracker app](#) might be used. Make sure you have fit-for-purpose and efficient communication systems in place to minimise the risk of miscommunications or lost emails. Good practice should be that no submission is unanswered, and whilst a single-line email is preferable to an auto-response, an auto-response to a submission is also acceptable. If entries will not be acknowledged, state this clearly at the outset.
19. **Manage expectations:** to help manage expectations, we ask that you provide a timeframe in which authors can expect to hear whether their entry has been successful, and update this timeframe if it shifts or is extended.
20. **Be clear on the outcome of a submission:** send your rejections as swiftly as possible. These should be worded with compassion and professionalism but be clear and direct.
21. **Respect and reflect the industry professional values:** the principles underlined in the [industry statement on professional values and behaviours](#) should be respected.

## **Contract terms and rights if the competition requires publication or other rights from the author rather than simply awarding prize money**

22. **If a submission is successful:** any use of the submission by the competition should be clearly stated at the outset and in plain English in the terms and conditions. The submission must be treated in confidence and all rights retained by the author unless and until the submission is successful and, in the event of a publishing contract being the prize, terms have been agreed. If the prize is a publishing contract, when issuing the agreement, consider stating that you are happy for the author to discuss any

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proposed terms with the Society of Authors' team of specialist advisers or other professional advisers, and that you will allow time for this to happen.

## **Data protection, confidentiality and legal compliance**

23. **Confidentiality:** check that your internal processes ensure the confidentiality of submissions and avoid conflicts of interest or inadvertent copying of ideas or work. We recognise that submissions may need to be reproduced and circulated to those responsible for judging them. Such dissemination in confidence is acceptable unless specific restrictions on who can review the submission are imposed by the author; but not otherwise. If appropriate, you might want to request that successful submissions are kept confidential until the prize is announced. Even if submissions are judged blind, make it clear that copyright remains with the author (e.g. '© the author 2025' rather than '© author's name'). Ask the judges to treat all submissions in strict confidence.
24. **Record-keeping:** adopt and maintain practical internal processes for the receipt of entries to ensure that they are recorded. Data should be kept in accordance with current data, privacy and confidentiality laws.
25. **Data protection:** in line with your Data Protection Policy\*, ensure you destroy entries together with the author's personal data once the judging process is complete. If you wish to keep data for the purposes of later contact or commission, you need to ask the author's permission to do so. If you accept hard-copy submissions, ensure these are not original documents before securely disposing of these.

*\*Data protection policies and processes should be up-to-date, clear and easily accessible via your website explaining how submissions and personal data will be processed securely, how long they will be kept, and how data is used and subsequently disposed of. For further advice and guidance, see: [Policies and procedures / ICO](#).*

**Thank you for reading this guidance with a view to providing best practice in your submissions process, and for looking after the authors on whom the publishing industry depends for its success.**

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## B. Guidance for authors submitting work

When submitting your work to a competition, and receiving acceptances or rejections, we advise that you adhere to the following good practice:

1. **Adhere to the organiser rules and process:** ensure you carefully read and adhere to the entry processes of the relevant organisation. The guidance exists to ensure a smooth process.
2. **Submit a complete entry:** provide all the required information. If you feel you are being asked for information you are not happy to reveal, do not hesitate to query issues with the competition or to take advice from the Society of Authors or another professional adviser. Take care to read and follow all guidelines.
3. **Accept a rejection as final:** do not expect to enter into correspondence after receiving a rejection.
4. **Respect confidentiality:** refrain from posting on social media or other public channels about winning until the organisation has had time to inform all authors about the outcome of their entries (whether successful or not).
5. **Be professional at all times:** the principles underlined in the [industry statement on professional values and behaviours](#) should be respected.

### Terms and conditions and copyright

6. **Read all rules and terms carefully:** if you have questions or if they concern you in any way (eg, if you are asked to grant any rights, unjustifiable fees are charged, etc), consult the Society of Authors or take advice from another professional adviser.
7. **If the competition is seeking publishing or other rights from you as a result of winning the prize:** have the proposed agreement vetted by a professional. All contracts should be negotiable. Advisers at the Society of Authors can help you understand what is being offered.

### Data protection, confidentiality and legal compliance

8. **Request confidentiality:** organisers should make sure entries are treated confidentially. Some authors however find it reassuring to state in writing that the submission is being sent in confidence, and that it is subject to data privacy and intellectual property laws. The copyright notice should be in your name but if you are instructed not to include your name because the competition is being judged blind, you can say '© the author 2025'.

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9. **Evidence:** retain an exact copy of the submission together with the date submitted, the name and any other relevant details of the person to whom your proposal was sent.

## C. A final reminder...

In accordance with the [Book and Publishing Industry's Professional Values](#) it is essential that all participants in the publishing process hold themselves to the highest standards of professional behaviour.

We believe that an industry commitment of this kind can support an industry-wide culture we can be proud of.

## Further resources

- [Agency submissions best practice guidelines](#)
- [Publisher submissions best practice guidelines](#)
- [The APC Code of Practice](#)
- [Publishers-Association-Code-of-Practice-on-Author-Contracts-2010.pdf](#)

We consider all feedback and update this guidance periodically.

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