

# The Report



# OWFI Report, Fall 2019

## In This Issue

- 3 Letter from the President
- 4 2020 Conference Support & Volunteer Opportunities
- 5 The 2019 Crème de la Crème Winner
- 6 Virtual Workshop Info Featuring Jack Burgos
- 7 Guest Column by Staci Mauney
- 8 2020 Conference Faculty Preview
- 9 2020 Conference Timeline, Costs, and Prize Information
- 10 2020 Writing Contest Information
- 13 2020 Writing Contest Categories
- 18 Guest Column by Kathleen Park
- 19 Flash Fiction Winners

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The Report is the newsletter of the Oklahoma Writers' Federation, Inc., and is published three times per year. Submission questions or submissions should be directed to the newsletter editor.  
editor@owfi.org


Printed by Schatz Publishing Group.

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Founded in 1968, the Oklahoma Writers' Federation, Inc. (OWFI) is a non-profit federation of writers' groups dedicated to promoting higher standards for the written word. We believe that the literary profession has come of age and merits a fair share of the critical acclaim so generously lavished on other worthwhile arts. OWFI shall seek to coordinate and encourage professional writing within and without its organization and promote the recognition of outstanding contributions to the written language.

## Contributing Writers

- Jack Burgos
- Staci Mauney
- Shelley Pagach
- Kathleen Park



***REMINDER***

**Make sure you've cashed your checks from the 2019 contest!**

**You have six months from the check date to cash your check!**

# Letter from the President

I had my second OWFI-induced nightmare a few nights ago. Many who have passed the baton might read this and nod sagely. I know I will when it's my turn to look back. The dream had to do with preparation (or the complete and utter lack thereof). At least it wasn't one of those "naked" dreams, am I right? But being unprepared can leave me feeling as vulnerable as the Emperor when he realized he had no clothes on.

So here's to preparation! I want to make sure everyone knows about all the new and not-so-new features we have on our website.

Be a part of our Thunderdome! This is a friendly competition between all our affiliates, including our members at large. More information is located under our Affiliates section on the website.

Have a meeting coming up? Need to make a change to your affiliate information? Send us the update and receive points for your affiliate.

Don't have any affiliate news or changes, but you do have a book signing or other event you'd like to post? Head to our Activities section and add your event.

October is traditionally the time of year when membership renewals are due.

If you are set up on automatic renewal, watch your email for a reminder about the withdrawal. (Don't forget to check your spam folder just in case.)

If you are like me and cannot remember what happened last week let alone when your last automatic renewal came out, check your profile under Billing and View

Charge History. This will show the last time your dues were deducted.

While you're checking out the website bells and whistles, take a gander at our contest page.

NEW look, NEW rules, NEW category numbers!

Our contest opens January 1, 2020, so you have plenty of time to familiarize yourself with the changes and enter as many categories as inspiration spurs you toward!

Have you participated in our virtual workshops? They are scheduled every other month with a wide variety of topics, including one of my favorites so far, September's workshop—Improving the Quality of Our Suffering: Poetry Crash Course. Adrean Messmer shared her expertise in a way that inspired me to read more poetry and even start writing it again. Thank you, Adrean!

The next virtual workshop is scheduled for November 21, 2019. Our very own Jack Burgos will speak about Shattering the Block: The Psychology and Treatment of Writer's Block. Like the Oxford comma, I have witnessed a growing controversy. Some say it doesn't exist, while others confirm its existence with every breath. (I don't think I have to tell you which camp I belong to.) Join us this November and listen to what Jack has to say about it. I know I can't wait!

Finally, registration for our 2020 Bridging the Gap OWFI Conference will open very soon. Watch the website for that and speaker information!

Keep writing, OWFI!



*Shelley Pagach is the OWFI President for 2019-2020.*

# Conference Support & Volunteering

## OWFI's Banquet Table Reservations

- Table reservations are a fundraiser. If you are registered for the banquets, you are **GUARANTEED** a seat. You **DO NOT** need to reserve a table in order to have a seat at the banquets.
- **PLEASE** wait at the door to be seated.
- If you have a large group that wishes to be seated together, make your reservations early.
- The maximum number of tables a group or individual may reserve is a total of **TWO**.
- Reservations are open now (online only).
- Table reservations are \$25 per table, per night.
- For questions or more info, please contact [vck@cox.net](mailto:vck@cox.net).

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## OWFI Contest Category Sponsorship

Your generous contributions to sponsor OWFI's contest categories are greatly appreciated.

- \$105 full sponsorship/\$55 for partial sponsorship: categories 1-29: Unpublished Manuscripts.
- \$60 full sponsorship: categories 30-34: Published Books.
- \$500 full sponsorship for the Crème de la Crème category. The group or individual sponsoring the Crème de la Crème category receives one free banquet table, front and center, for both nights.
- \$70 full sponsorship for the Crème de la Crème trophy.
- Sponsorships can be made online at [www.owfi.org/contest2020/sponsor](http://www.owfi.org/contest2020/sponsor) or by mail.
  - Make checks payable to **Oklahoma Writers' Federation Inc.**
  - In the memo section, write, **Category Sponsorship**. (DO NOT indicate which category on the check).
  - Mail your check to:  
Contest Category Sponsorship Chair  
Vickey Malone Kennedy  
721 East Boyd Street  
Norman, OK 73071
  - **On a separate sheet of paper, include the following:** a sponsor name, contact information (email & phone number), and a list of three (3) categories you'd like to sponsor.
  - Please indicate if the sponsorship is in memory or honor of someone.
- For questions or more info, contact [vck@cox.net](mailto:vck@cox.net).

## 2020 Conference Committee Chairs

We rely on our volunteers to help make our conference a success. If you want to join us—and make some great friends while you're at it—check out our list of committee chairs below. You can contact our Conference Chair if you have any additional questions.

Banquet Table Reservations Chair  
Vickey Kennedy

Basket Wars Chair  
Jayleen Mayes

Book Room & Author Signing Chair  
TBD

Centerpiece Chair  
Dianna Street

Contest Category Sponsorship Chair  
Vickey Kennedy

Costume Contest Chair  
Amy Shojai

Famous Author Banquet Slideshow Chair  
Jennifer McMurrain

Fundraiser Chair  
Ariel White

Pitch Room Chair  
Connor Orion

Registration Chair  
Vickey Kennedy

Scholarship Chair  
Myloe Yeager

Technoscribes Chair  
Jack Burgos

Virtual Workshop Chair  
Connor Orion

# Meet the 2019 Crème de la Crème Winner

Meet OWFI member John Biggs. He won the best of contest award this year, the coveted Crème de la Crème award, with his piece, "Spirit Troubles."



*OWFI: How did you feel when you heard you were the Crème de la Crème winner?*

John Biggs: I think it always takes a writer by surprise when he wins a prize like that. This one was especially surprising to me because it was my second time to win. I didn't think this sort of thing could happen to me twice in a lifetime.

*OWFI: Tell us more about your winning entry.*

John Biggs: "Spirit Troubles" is based on a combination of two traditional Choctaw spirits – the Impashalupe and the Grass Water Drop. They wreck their victims' lives, but totally without violence. I entered this story last year in significantly different form and in a different category. Eric Reitan was the judge. He made some editorial suggestions that put me on the right track for this year's conference.

*OWFI: How long have you been writing?*

John Biggs: I started writing after I turned 50, rather late in life. That was in 2001. I fumbled for a couple of years on a novel that has never seen the

light of day until I realized I needed to develop my skills on short fiction.

*OWFI: Are you in a writing/critique group?*

John Biggs: I have been a member of Tulsa Night Writers, and I am a member of Oklahoma City Writers now. I joined a critique group made up of writers I met at a Bernhardt seminar and stuck with them for about five years. That group faded away around 2012 and I haven't joined another.

*OWFI: How do you keep yourself accountable to your writing?*

John Biggs: I have always believed that writing is an addictive behavior. I usually spend two to three hours a day working on a project. It's more a matter of not being able to stop myself than forcing myself to sit down and write.

*OWFI: Best writing tips?*

John Biggs: Don't write a story too soon. Spend a couple of weeks thinking about it while you are refining something else, and don't put anything new (other than notes) on a page until you feel like you are about to explode.

Keep a notebook with you and write down ideas about your narrative as they come to you, even if that is in the middle of the night. The craziest ideas will often turn out to be the best ones.

If you have two or more story ideas that don't seem to be working, combine them into a single narrative.

*OWFI: What are you planning next?*

John Biggs: I have a western fiction / speculative fiction novel that needs work. I'm also going to continue working on short fiction pieces, and I may drag out the very first thing I wrote in 2001 and try to turn it into something people might want to read.

*OWFI: What do you do for fun when you're not writing?*

John Biggs: I love to travel, especially to faraway places with unfamiliar cultures. My wife and I have been all over

Europe, Asia, and Central America, and we've touched on North Africa and South America. One of my favorite places for repeat visits is San Miguel De Allende in central Mexico. I always write while I'm traveling.

*OWFI: What is your favorite OWFI memory?*

John Biggs: Well, I won two Crème de la Crème prizes. That has to figure pretty high on the pleasant memory scale, but the thing I like about OWFI more than anything is meeting so many friendly introverts.

*OWFI: What are your past published or not yet published works?*

John Biggs: I've had over 60 short stories published. I'm always happy when that happens, but I quit counting a while back. I've published four novels with small publishing houses: *Owl Dreams*, *Popsicle Styx* (Oklahoma Book Award Finalist), *Cherokee Ice* (Oklahoma Book Award Finalist & OWFI Best Published Novel 2016), *Shiners* (OWFI Best Published Novel 2018). I also have a book of linked short stories that reads pretty much like a novel, *Sacred Alarm Clock*, and a collection of linked novellas, *Clementine: A Song for the End of the World*.

*OWFI: Who are your favorite authors?*

John Biggs: Robert Heinlein is the author who made me want to write, but if I could write like anyone, I'd pick T.C. Boyle.

*OWFI: Anything to say to the next Crème de la Crème winner?*

John Biggs: I won't give any advice, but I will say this: isn't it good to know other writers like your stories?

*For more information or to reach out to John Biggs, check out his website at <http://johnbiggsoklahomawriter.com>.*

# Virtual Workshop

## Shattering the Block

### **Shattering the Block - The Psychology and Treatment of Writer's Block** with Jack Burgos November 21 at 7 PM

Many very intelligent people disagree about whether writer's block exists. What is clear is that many aspiring authors often feel "blocked"—the sense of being incapable of continuing to compose new work, or the distinct feeling that one's creativity has ground to a halt. In this virtual workshop, we will operationalize writer's block from a cognitive-behavioral perspective based on what the research has shown about differences between people who experience writer's block (i.e., "blockers") and people who don't (i.e., "nonblockers"). We will list the basic elements of writer's block and go over how each interferes with the composition process. Finally, we will talk about how to address writer's block in real life, that is, how to get rid of it for good: a discussion that you will find especially useful if you can identify yourself as a "blocker."



Jack Burgos is a 36-year-old, Hispanic, pansexual, cismale (he/him/his pronouns) author of transgressive, speculative fiction living in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was born in Miami, Florida, the son of Colombian and Cuban immigrants. He graduated cum laude from Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2007, with a B.A. in philosophy, a minor in political science, and a concentration in creative writing. He graduated with an M.A. in clinical psychology from the University of Tulsa in 2013. Jack serves as the webmaster for the Oklahoma Writers' Federation, Inc. and as the President for Nevermore Edits. When he isn't engaged in writing-related activities, Jack proudly works as a licensed professional counselor for a non-profit community mental health agency in Tulsa.

For more information and to sign up, go to  
[www.owfi.org/virtualworkshops/](http://www.owfi.org/virtualworkshops/)

## Four Tips to Improve Your Short Stories

Writing short stories can be an excellent way to improve your craft. Short stories contain all the elements of a full-length novel, so the medium is a good way to work out any issues in your writing.

To start, let's define the term "short story": a fully developed work of fiction significantly shorter than a novel. A short story generally doesn't exceed 8,000 words, and most are between 2,000 and 5,000 words. (The highest word count for any short story in the OWFI writing contest is 5,000 words.) Flash fiction falls between 500 and 1,000 words, and micro-fiction is 500 words or fewer.

If you write short stories, you're in good company. Edgar Allan Poe was one of the earliest practitioners, and Sylvia Plath started her career by writing short stories. Ernest Hemingway famously wrote a six-word micro-fiction story in answer to a bet, but there's some debate as to the authenticity of that attribution. Whether or not Hemingway actually wrote the story, the fact remains that micro-fiction has gained popularity in the modern

age through the use of Twitter's restricted word counts.

When writing short stories, consider the following four tips:

### 1. Find the heart of your story.

Connect to a deep emotion that stays with the reader long after he or she stops reading. Think about the types of stories you like and what you feel when reading them. Make a list, and refer to it to decide what you want your reader to feel.

### 2. Limit the number of characters.

For a short story, you will have no more than three characters. Cut any characters that are unnecessary to the plot. Characters need room to grow, and limiting the number of characters will give them the space they need.

### 3. Drop the reader into the action.

A strong opening line isn't easy, but it is necessary to hook your reader immediately since you have such a limited word count with which to do so. Start in the middle of the action. Short stories usually only show a slice of the main character's life, and focusing on a

single scene or incident will help you hone in on the theme.

### 4. Stick to the allowed word count.

Edit your work to ensure you meet the allowed word count. Read your story out loud. Share it with a friend or your critique group. Whatever you do, stay under the maximum word count.

When you have perfected your story, submit it to a literary journal or writing contest. Enter the OWFI writing contest this January, and search Poets & Writers ([www.pw.org](http://www.pw.org)) to find other legitimate contests. Duotrope ([www.duotrope.com](http://www.duotrope.com)) is another great resource, but there is a fee to join.

As with any format, the more you write, the better you'll become. Use the short story format to focus on specific issues in your writing, and watch your craft improve.

*Staci Mauney is the author of four devotionals and several short stories. Current OWFI Past President, she co-owns Prestige Prose, a professional editing and writing company. Visit her at [prestigepro.com](http://prestigepro.com).*

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## Next OWFI Board Meeting

December 1

# 2020 Conference Faculty

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

Alton Carter

## PRE-CONFERENCE SPEAKER:

Tamara Grantham

## AGENTS:

Heather Cashman  
Storm Literary Agency

## EDITORS:

Shannon Iwanski  
A Murder of Storytellers

Rhonda Penders  
Wild Rose Press

Ally Robinson  
Wild Rose Press

Vivian Zabel  
4RV Publishing

## SPEAKERS:

H.B. Berlow

Amy Collins

Glenda Galvan

Ross Lampert

Marty Ludlum

Lisa Marotta  
and Charles Gosset

Staci Mauney

Dianne McCartney

Marcia Preston

Traci Schafer

Frank Steele

Maria Veres

Find the most  
up-to-date conference  
information online at  
<https://www.owfi.org/>  
and check under the  
CONFERENCE dropdown.

SUPPORT OWFI.

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You shop. Amazon gives.

Every time you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com),  
Amazon will donate to our organization. Go to  
[smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com) and search for Oklahoma  
Writers' Federation, Inc. (OWFI).



# The 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Timeline, Cost, and Awards/Prizes

Take note of the following few pages as they reflect updated changes to the contest!

*The 2020 OWFI writing contest will open for submissions on January 1, 2020.*

**Entry fees, online entry forms, and individual manuscripts must be either sent or uploaded on or before February 1, 2020, at 11:59 p.m.** You will receive a confirmation e-mail within 24 hours. If you do not receive said email, notify the webmaster via the CONTACT US page.

<https://www.owfi.org/contact-us>

Each of the unpublished categories (1-29) award electronic badges for each place and honorable mention, and cash prizes of \$50, \$35, and \$20 for first, second, and third place, respectively.

The Crème de la Crème (best of all first place unpublished winners) is awarded \$500, a trophy, and electronic badge. The published book categories (30-34) are awarded a trophy and electronic book (no cash award).

We encourage our judges to provide feedback on all entries. All judges are vetted through an application process and are authors, agents, editors, or other writing/publishing professionals.

Awards will be announced during the awards banquet portion of the conference on the evening of May 2, 2020, as well as on our website, social media sites, and in the summer issue of *The Report*.

If you are unable to attend the banquet, your award(s) will be mailed to you. Please make sure the address you have on file with OWFI is correct, especially if you have recently moved. To check and/or update your address in our members' database, visit

[https://owfi.memberspace.com/member/sign\\_in](https://owfi.memberspace.com/member/sign_in)



# The 2020 OWFI Writing Contest

## Eligibility Requirements

### 1. Entrants must be members of OWFI.

In order to join the contest, you must be a member of OWFI in good standing during the entire period of the contest. If your membership expires at any time during the contest, please be aware that your piece(s) will only be considered valid if you are still a member of OWFI on the date the awards are announced (see timeline section, page 9).

For information on joining OWFI, visit our membership page. Types of memberships are as follows:

- Member-at-Large – \$30
- Affiliate Club Member – \$25
- Student – Free

### 2. All entrants (including students) must pay the \$30 non-refundable contest entry fee.

### 3. An **entrant** can only enter **ONCE PER CATEGORY**.

Feel free to enter as many categories as you'd like, though. Teams and individuals are considered separate entities. Therefore, an entrant can enter a category as both an individual and a member of a co-authored piece.

### 4. A **piece** can be entered in **ONLY ONE CATEGORY**.

Feel free to enter as many categories as you'd like. However, you cannot enter the same piece in multiple categories.

5. For **unpublished categories**, **NO IDENTIFYING INFORMATION**, such as either your legal or pen name, may appear on any page of your entry. **Inclusion of identifying information will result in immediate disqualification with no refund of entry fee.** (This rule is impractical for published books and, therefore, does not apply to published book categories.)

If entering a piece of work that includes your name throughout the piece, such as a memoir, replace your name with another in order to meet the requirement of having no identifying information.

OWFI strives to conduct a fair and unbiased contest. Judges are provided the submitted writing piece only. They are not privy to the entry forms or any other personal information about the entrants.

### 6. Contestants who win first place in an OWFI **unpublished** contest category may **not** enter that same category the following year.

Contestants who win in an OWFI **published** category **may** enter that same category the following year, but may **not** enter the same piece.

### 7. No manuscript that has won a cash prize (first, second, or third place) in a previous OWFI contest may be entered again, with **one exception** as follows:

If your piece won a cash prize in an **unpublished** category, you may enter that same piece in a published category once it has been **published**. The piece must comply with the rules for the category entered.

### 8. Entries in all **unpublished** categories must **not** have been published or accepted for publication at the time of submission.

Works that have been posted on any online media including blogs (other than your own personal/author blog), websites, social media, or other online venues (except for critique purposes) are considered published and are not eligible for entry in unpublished categories.

If accepted by a publisher **after** entry, the submission will be considered valid.

### 9. Books entered in any **published** book category must have a first edition copyright year of 2018 or 2019.

### 10. Only electronic submissions are permitted. This includes the published book categories.

### 11. Judges may not enter a category in which they are a judge.

### 12. Contest chairs (if any) may not enter a category in which they are the chair.

### 13. **Co-Authored Entries**

- All members of the writing team must be OWFI members.
- The team will be considered a single entrant and must pay a **separate** entry fee for their co-authored entries.
- Teams and individuals are considered separate entities in regard to category submissions. (See Rule #3.)
- Co-authored entries include such works as published anthologies and compilations of works by multiple authors.

# The 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Entry Procedures & File Prep

## Entry Procedures

1. Complete the online contest entry form and pay \$30 **NONREFUNDABLE** entry fee online.

<https://www.owfi.org/contest2020/enter>

*(The link will not work until contest opens)*

This covers entry into as many categories as permitted by the OWFI Contest Rules contained on this page.

2. Fill out your online submission form.

- Each submission will need a separate submission form.
- Your electronic writing piece must be attached to each submission. **For published categories**, this file must include your book cover.
- An automated confirmation email will be sent for each submission and will serve as your receipt of submissions. If you do not receive this within 24 hours, please contact our webmaster via the CONTACT US page at:

<https://www.owfi.org/contact-us>

- Entrants are encouraged to submit at least two weeks prior to the contest deadline to assure entries are received on time.

## File Preparation

1. Acceptable File Types

- Unpublished Categories – .doc, .docx, or .pdf formats.
- Published Categories – .pdf, .mobi, or .epub formats.

2. File Name Requirements

Name your file in the following format:

`cat[category number][manuscript title without spaces or accents]`

Example 1:

If you are entering a piece entitled, “The Rats of Penzance,” into “Category 4 – Prose Humor,” and your file is in .docx format,

name your file as follows:

**cat4theratsofpenzance**

File will automatically save with the file extension as follows:

**cat4theratsofpenzance.docx**

Example 2 (with punctuation):

If you are entering a piece entitled, “Morning’s Dew,” into “Category 10 – Poetry: Rhymed Long,” and the file type is .pdf format,

name your file as follows:

**cat10morningsdew**

File will automatically save with the file extension as follows:

**cat10morningsdew.pdf**

# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest

## Formatting

We want to thank Kathleen Listman for her assistance in providing more information on formatting. Kathleen is a member of the OWFI affiliate Oklahoma City Writers, Inc. She is the Crème de la Crème recipient for the 2017 Oklahoma City Writers contest. These rules are posted online.

<https://www.owfi.org/contest2020/rules/formatting>

### Unpublished Categories (Except Poetry and Script)

1. Maximum and minimum manuscript lengths by word count or page number are listed under each category.
2. If word count is required – Use the word count on word processor.
3. Header, first page – Located in the upper right-hand corner and includes:

- First Line – Category Number
- Second Line – Category Name

For the following categories that cover more than one type/age of writing, please specify only the type/age that applies to your entry:

- Category 3 – State either Memoir or Nostalgia
- Category 5 – State either Film, Play, or TV
- Category 8 – State either Technical or How-To
- Category 14 – State either Ages 7–9 or Ages 8–12
- Category 19 – State either Sci-Fi or Fantasy
- Category 22 – State either Narrative or General
- Category 26 – State either Mystery or Suspense/Thriller
- Category 28 – State either Sci-Fi or Fantasy

- Third Line:
  - FOR ALL NONFICTION: include number of words
  - FOR ALL FICTION or PICTURE BOOK: include number of pages

4. Header, all subsequent pages – Located in the upper right-hand corner and includes:

- First Line – Title
- Second Line – Page number

5. Title – Located 2 spaces after header, centered, and 2 spaces above the intended work.

6. **FOR PICTURE BOOKS** – Illustrations should not be included with your submission.

7. **FOR BOOK AND NOVEL CATEGORIES:**

- First page should include the following:

- Header
  - Title
  - Synopsis, outline, or table of contents
- Synopsis, outline, table of contents:
    - A synopsis counts as part of the total number of pages, which is listed under each category. The synopsis can be single-spaced. It should be between 1 to 3 pages.
    - For non-fiction categories, outlines and/or table of contents may be submitted in lieu of a synopsis, but still count as part of the total number of pages, and should be single-spaced and follow word count requirements.
  - Chapter headings:
    - Should be 12-point font.
    - Located approximately 3 inches below the top of the page and centered.
  - Include the first page through maximum number of pages, which is described under each category.

### Poetry

1. Maximum and minimum manuscript lengths by lines are listed under each category.
2. Header, first page – Located in the upper right-hand corner and includes:
  - First Line – Category Number
  - Second Line – Category Name
  - Third Line – Number of lines (Epigraphs and spaces are not part of the line count.)
3. Header, all subsequent pages – Located in upper right-hand corner and includes:
  - First Line - Title
  - Second Line - Page number
4. Title – Located 2 spaces after header, centered or flush left to align with the poem, and 2 spaces above the intended work.
5. Font – 12-point font in black for entire work. Times New Roman.
6. Line spacing – Can be single spaced, with double spaces in between stanzas as author deems necessary.
7. Margins – Must be at 1 inch (3 cm) on all sides.
8. Text alignment – Standard flush left (ragged right), unless poem requires flexibility.
9. Footer – Nothing should be in footer (even if industry standards say to put information there).

Script: Play, Film, or TV

Please visit the website for formatting on scripts.

# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Categories

## \* Take Notice of New Category Numbers\*

### Categories 1-29: Unpublished Manuscripts

#### CATEGORY 1 PERSONAL BLOG (NONFICTION)

Personal reflections, comments, opinions, or even journalistic pieces posted to your own personal/author website only. However, all active links must be removed.

*Limit 1100 words.*

#### CATEGORY 2 ESSAY (ANY SUBJECT OF CONTEMPORARY INTEREST)

Essays are personal opinion pieces using narrative form to convince the reader of a certain point of view or, at least, to better understand the author's point of view. There are formal, fact-driven essays (George Will) and informal, lighter essays (Erma Bombeck). Bear in mind the quality and logic of the argument and how well the author uses facts, reasoning, and literary tools such as analogy to convince. Sometimes an opinion can be presented, a point of view expressed, or an argument driven home in a new or unusual way by telling a story, seeming to take the opposite point of view, or constructing a fable with a clear moral at the end.

*Limit 2000 words.*

#### CATEGORY 3 MEMOIR/NOSTALGIA

Memoir is first-person, narrative nonfiction that focuses on one specific aspect of the writer's life or experience. Nostalgia focuses on down-home occurrences reflecting the past; these pieces evoke a fond remembrance of a time gone by, or memories of childhood.

*Limit 4000 words.*

Note "Memoir" or "Nostalgia" on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

#### CATEGORY 4 PROSE HUMOR: FICTION OR NONFICTION

Prose humor is exactly that—a piece of writing meant to evoke humor. Everyday experiences can resonate with the reader, and common interest stories, when written in a clever and entertaining voice, bring forth a smile. The humor piece should also meet the criteria of its form: column, short story, article/feature, or essay. Manuscripts submitted in this category should be targeted toward an adult audience.

*Limit 2000 words.*

#### CATEGORY 5 SCRIPT: FILM, PLAY, OR TV

One, two, or three acts. As in all categories, entries must be unaccepted and never optioned or produced by the time of submission. Formatting must follow accepted industry standards. Submit complete synopsis and opening scene(s).

*Complete submission limit 30 pages (or less).*

Note "Film," "Play," or "TV" on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

#### CATEGORY 6 ARTICLE: INSPIRATIONAL

Entries to this category should concern a personal experience or struggle that provides inspiration or hope to others. A profile or personal story should touch the reader in some way, impart a valuable message, and/or educate the reader in some way. While this piece can be religious in nature, it is not mandatory. The piece should strive to inspire and motivate the reader. It may be a vehicle for presenting the author's opinion about a topic that has personally affected him or her and may also include a call to action. The author's voice and style give the piece life.

*Limit 3000 words.*

#### CATEGORY 7 ARTICLE: NONFICTION FEATURE (ANY SUBJECT)

These are the articles listed prominently in a publication (e.g., magazine, newspaper, online, etc.) covering a subject of great interest to that medium's target audience. The article must clearly have a reason to exist and not simply serve as a vehicle for advertising. Nor should it be a vehicle for presenting the author's opinion about a particular topic. (For opinion pieces, see the "How-To," "Inspirational," or "Essay" category descriptions.) More than just the facts, a feature article uses a great hook, expert quotes, and a bang-up conclusion to convey its topic. The author's voice and style give the piece life.

*Limit 2500 words..*

#### CATEGORY 8 ARTICLE: TECHNICAL AND/OR HOW-TO (ANY SUBJECT)

This category is made up of two different genres that both aim to educate readers in different ways. Each style presents a problem, describes why it matters, then provides the solution—and sometimes offers a call to action. Technical articles are generally longer and cover a narrow but serious subject in great depth; they rely on more than one expert (often including the author) to provide information that educates and

# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Categories

informs a specific target audience. While the article may be scientific, it should also be readable and easy to understand and absorb. The reader should come away with useful information. How-To articles are often shorter edutainment—1500 words may be too long!—lighter fare that may rely on the expertise of the author alone. These articles not only educate and inform, they also provide specific and detailed steps for the reader to accomplish the stated goal (e.g., how to bake cookies, make a craft, prepare a devotional, or write a novel). A central theme follows through to the end.

*Limit 3000 words.*

Note “Technical” or “How-To” on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 9 POETRY: RHYMED SHORT

Any theme, any form. A poem is characterized by intense, compressed language. Every word is carefully chosen. A poem can tell a story, create an image, or evoke an emotion. In all cases, it is an art form and should go beyond plain prose to evoke something deeper. Any rhyming form may be used for this category.

*Sixteen (16) lines or less (Epigraphs and spaces are not part of the line count.)*

## CATEGORY 10 POETRY: RHYMED LONG

Any theme, any form. A poem is characterized by intense, compressed language. Every word is carefully chosen. A poem can tell a story, create an image, or evoke an emotion. In all cases, it is an art form and should go beyond plain prose to evoke something deeper. Any rhyming form may be used for this category.

*Seventeen (17) lines or more. (Epigraphs and spaces are not part of the line count.)*

## CATEGORY 11 POETRY: UNRHYMED SHORT

Any theme, any form. A poem is characterized by intense, compressed language. Every word is carefully chosen. A poem can tell a story, create an image, or evoke an emotion. In all cases, it is an art form and should go beyond plain prose to evoke something deeper.

*Sixteen (16) lines or less. (Epigraphs and spaces are not part of the line count.)*

## CATEGORY 12 POETRY: UNRHYMED LONG

Any theme, any form. A poem is characterized by intense, compressed language. Every word is carefully

chosen. A poem can tell a story, create an image, or evoke an emotion. In all cases, it is an art form and should go beyond plain prose to evoke something deeper.

*Seventeen (17) lines or more. (Epigraphs and spaces are not part of the line count.)*

## CATEGORY 13 SHORT STORY: FLASH FICTION

An extremely short but complete work of fiction. As with longer stories, a flash fiction story must contain the four elements of fiction: setting (which is usually implied rather than fully described), one or more characters, a conflict, and a resolution. Because of length limitations, these stories often make use of suggestion and innuendo. This is fiction in its barest, most essential form; every word must move the story forward. Stories submitted in this category should be targeted to an adult audience.

*Limit 500 words.*

## CATEGORY 14 SHORT STORY: SHORT-SHORT (JUVENILE)

A juvenile short story (subject matter aimed at readers 7 - 12) is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel and with a subject matter aimed at children. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*For readers ages 7–9, limit 600 words. For readers 8–12, limit 1000 words.*

Note target audience's age range on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 15 SHORT STORY: SHORT-SHORT (YOUNG ADULT)

A young adult (YA) short story (subject matter aimed at readers 13–18) is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring

# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Categories

about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*Limit 2000 words.*

## CATEGORY 16 SHORT STORY: SHORT-SHORT (ADULT)

A short-short story is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*Limit 2000 words.*

## CATEGORY 17 SHORT STORY: ADULT

A short story is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*2000 to 4000 words.*

## CATEGORY 18 SHORT STORY: HORROR

A horror short story (subject matter aimed at scaring the reader) is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*Limit 5000 words.*

## CATEGORY 19 SHORT STORY: SCI-FI/FANTASY

Science fiction includes stories in which futuristic technology or otherwise altered scientific principles contribute in a significant way to the adventure. Often the novel assumes a set of rules, principles, or facts and traces their logical consequences. Fantasy includes stories in which magical, otherworldly, or supernatural elements are a central part of the plot or setting. Many fantasies take place on imaginary worlds. Characters may be something other than human or may possess magical powers. A sci-fi/fantasy short story (genres limited to sci-fi and fantasy) is a brief piece of fiction pointed and more economically detailed as to character, situation, and plot than a novel. It often revolves around a single theme or one climactic event, developing a single character in depth. Narrower than a novel, a short story contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist. All short stories should present the major character with an important problem that the character must struggle to solve and engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story's end.

*Limit 5000 words.*

Note "Sci-Fi" or "Fantasy" on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 20 BOOK: PICTURE - FICTION OR NONFICTION (FOR AGES 1-8)

Picture books are large, art-filled books for children, which are primarily targeted to ages 1-8, but are also appealing to older kids and even adults. They are designed to bring information and/or entertainment to life for young eyes, and the text must be minimal. These books have a beginning, middle, and end. Picture books do not necessarily feature a character, but when they do, the protagonist must solve his or her own problem, and the problem should be something significant. Often a picture book portrays a concept such as numbers, letters, the weather, colors, etc. Picture books may also evoke a mood, such as a bedtime story. These books should be engaging and present the topic in a fresh, childlike way. (Show, don't tell!)

*Limit 750 words.*

## CATEGORY 21 BOOK: MIDDLE GRADE - FICTION OR NONFICTION (FOR AGES 8-12)

Same as Category 20, yet written for children ages 8-12.

# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Categories

For fiction, think *Hank the Cowdog*. Submit the first consecutive chapters; a complete synopsis or outline; prologue, if any; and/or a nonfiction proposal (per industry standard).

*Limit 20 pages (or less).*

## CATEGORY 22 BOOK: NONFICTION (NARRATIVE OR GENERAL)

This category is made up of an enormous range of divergent topics, all of which seek to educate, inform, entertain, and sometimes inspire.

Narrative nonfiction follows the form and style of various fiction genres (think *The Perfect Storm* and *First, Do No Harm*). Depending on style, biographies and autobiographies or family histories may fall under the narrative nonfiction umbrella, which basically consists of any “true” subject told in a narrative form. The author often has a personal stake or shared experience in the story. This form requires a strong viewpoint character(s), story problems, and satisfying resolutions. The length of the complete work parallels similar works of fiction. Memoir is first-person, narrative nonfiction that focuses on one specific aspect of the writer’s life or experience. Nostalgia focuses on down-home occurrences reflecting the past; these pieces evoke a fond remembrance of a time gone by or memories of childhood.

General nonfiction more commonly presents technical, self-help, or how-to information; inspirational works; or otherwise fact-based material derived from an author’s own expertise and research and outside expert sources. Style varies widely, but in all cases, content must be presented in a pleasing and accessible format. Chapters are typically broken up with sidebars, bulleted lists, photos/illustrations, tables, and other value-added materials and may include direct quotes, footnotes, etc. The length of a finished work varies widely, from short, illustrated gift books (under 20,000 words) to encyclopedia-length reference books (over 150,000 words).

For narrative nonfiction submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

For general nonfiction submit any representative chapters and include a chapter outline or book proposal per the industry standard (i.e., overview, market analysis/competition, table of contents, etc.).

*Limit to 30 pages (or less).*

Note “Narrative” or “General” on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 23 NOVEL: HISTORICAL FICTION

Historical fiction encompasses novels set anytime in the recent or distant past, such as ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, or World War II. These novels are time capsules of an era and/or culture—the setting serves as a character in itself. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

## CATEGORY 24 NOVEL: HORROR

Fiction intended to scare, unsettle, or horrify the reader. Historically, the cause of the “horror” experience has been the intrusion of an evil or, occasionally, a misunderstood, supernatural element into everyday human experience. Any fiction with a morbid, gruesome, surreal, or exceptionally suspenseful or frightening theme has come to be called “horror.” Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

## CATEGORY 25 NOVEL: MAINSTREAM

A successful mainstream novel tackles subjects of universal appeal, driven by characters and plots that find acceptance in the “mainstream” of readers. This category is large and diverse. Think Jodi Picoult, John Grisham, Harlan Coben, etc. Genre novels such as science fiction, mystery/suspense, romance, and historical fiction should be entered in their appropriate categories. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

## CATEGORY 26 MYSTERY OR SUSPENSE / THRILLER

This category is made up of two broad categories. Mystery novels are all about “whodunit.” These books have a strong hook/murder and a cast of suspicious and compelling characters, and readers compete to solve the puzzle before the author reveals the answer. Whether told in first person or third, mystery novels showcase the main character as he/she follows a maze of clues and incidents leading to the Big Reveal. Detective and police procedural, espionage/spies, amateur sleuth, series or stand-alones, a winning mystery novel is a tightly-woven question from beginning to end. Suspense novels and related thrillers also require a strong hook that often includes a murder/death involving a strong main character and a compelling cast. But unlike mysteries,



# 2020 OWFI Writing Contest Categories

suspense/thrillers more often focus on “how-dunit.” The antagonist may be an individual, organization (government), or thing (virus) known to readers from the beginning but often hidden from the protagonist. Suspense novels and thrillers may be first person but are more often third person, and often employ more than one viewpoint character. The main character may be the good guy or the bad guy. Whether a medical, psychological, techno, legal, or other sub-genre, the winning suspense novel is action-driven from beginning to end. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

Note “Mystery” or “Suspense/Thriller” on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 27 NOVEL: ROMANCE

The romance novel follows strong, vivid characters on their journey of discovery and emotional conflict to a shared and satisfying conclusion. No plot point, setting, or event takes precedence over the one central theme: the relationship between the two main characters. The end must leave the reader believing the protagonists’ love will endure for the remainder of their lives. This category includes all forms of romance, including historical romance. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

## CATEGORY 28 NOVEL: SCI-FI / FANTASY

This category is made up of two totally different genres. A science fiction novel is one in which futuristic technology or otherwise altered scientific principles contribute in a significant way to the adventure. Often the novel assumes a set of rules, principles, or facts and then traces their logical consequences; a fantasy novel is one in which magical, otherworldly, or supernatural elements are a central part of the plot or setting. Many fantasies take place on imaginary worlds. Characters may be something other than human or may possess magical powers. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Complete submission limit 25 pages (or less).*

Note “Sci-Fi” or “Fantasy” on your submission. (See Rules & Formatting.)

## CATEGORY 29 NOVEL: YOUNG ADULT (FOR AGES 13-18)

This category has the same rules as all books. Write

compelling stories with beginnings, middles, and ends. Think *Harry Potter*; the main character should have an important problem he/she struggles to solve. The story should engage the reader in caring about whether the character achieves that goal by the story’s end. These often deal with the tribulations of growing up. Review the various novel categories for further descriptions. Submit the first consecutive chapters and prologue, if any, with a complete synopsis.

*Limit to 20 pages (or less).*

## Categories 30–34: Published Books (Trophy Awards)

All entries in the following categories must have a copyright year of 2018 or 2019.

E-books, self-published books, and traditionally published books of any length are eligible.

CATEGORY 30 – BEST BOOK - POETRY  
Published book of poetry  
(chapbook or full-length collection).

CATEGORY 31 – BEST BOOK - NONFICTION  
Published nonfiction book.

CATEGORY 32 – BEST BOOK - JUVENILE  
Published book of fiction or nonfiction for readers ages  
1–12.

CATEGORY 33 – BEST BOOK - YOUNG ADULT  
Published book of fiction or nonfiction for readers ages  
13–18.

CATEGORY 34 – BEST BOOK - FICTION  
Published book of fiction (novel or short story  
collection).

## Crème de la Crème Award

A “Best of Contest” award will be chosen from among the first-place manuscripts in all 29 unpublished categories.

# Guest Column

## Watching Your Language

### Knee-Jerk Capitalizing and Other Afflictions

In my years as an English teacher and later as editor, I've seen and heard some interesting justifications for language errors. And guessed at others.

For example, it's almost an instinctual practice to make a word or sentence all caps for great emphasis. It's like shouting. But according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*, it is "rarely appropriate." If you absolutely must, I recommend you choose your target audience carefully. Readers of the funnies, perhaps.

The same instinct seems to fuel the impulse for initial caps regardless of rules. It's my guess that those who do it want to add importance to certain words with that initial capital letter.

Here are some common rules governing capitalizing to keep your knees steady and your writing un-afflicted.

First, the obvious: Capitalize the first word of a sentence. Not usually a problem. And proper names, of course. But that gets into thicker thickets sometimes. Easy to remember for names, like Molly and Joe, Smith and Jones and Schimmelmänn.

But what about Mom and Dad? When they are used as nouns of direct address: Hey, Mom, what's for dinner? Or I'm waiting for Dad, they are capitalized. Those are easy. But if you say I asked my mom about dinner, or Let's ask Joey's dad--then you have a horse of another color, as they say. Neither is a noun of direct address and is not used in place of a name and so is not capitalized.

There's more to consider about names and titles and capitalization. A title, whether military, civil, or even

honorary placed before the name and used as part of the name is capitalized: Major Barkley, President Obama, Director of Operations Williams, Mayor Jones. But not otherwise. We met with the major and his staff. The director of operations could not attend. The president was called away. The mayor was silent on the matter.

Now for the exceptions. You may have to deal with house rules, or specific style sheets an organization or company might adopt. If you are working for such, you will want to know about its in-house style sheet or even its unwritten rules. That outfit's preference may be always to capitalize Director or Chairman no matter where and how it may appear. If your check is signed by one of Them, play along. Within my own recent memory, the use of lower case p for the president of the United States followed the rule as exemplified above and in the venerable *Chicago Manual of Style*. Not anymore. Now you see it capitalized in every position.

You'd be surprised how frequently we see the error of capitalizing a word to give it emphasis, or worse, a phrase or entire sentence in all caps. You may do this for irony, as I did above, but use very sparingly. It is usually wrong to assume that capitalization gives emphasis. Make your words count; don't rely on special effects.

*Kathleen Park, MA, calls herself an escaped English teacher and a forever lover of words. Send her your grammar-related question: [katie.talks@gmail.com](mailto:katie.talks@gmail.com).*

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Look at the following pictures and ask yourself if you are inspired. Can you think of anything you would write? If so, enter online for a chance to be featured in a future issue of *The Report!* For more information find Flash Fiction in the ACTIVITIES drop down menu on our website.



# Flash Fiction Prompt Winners



**“Secret of the Fire”**  
by CM Healy

Two eyes lock across the room,  
Their hearts begin to yearn.  
They soon elope and strike a match  
A wedding candle burns.

As captain he must sail the seas  
But promised his return.  
The lady waits by window side  
Another candle burns.

The tides go in, the tides go out  
The lady grows concerned.  
She worries he is lost at sea  
But lets the candles burn.

The sun and moon danced ‘round and  
‘round  
Some urge her to adjourn.  
She simply smiles and nods her head  
Becoming taciturn.

She knows the secret of the fire  
A lesson she had learned.  
As long as candles have their flame  
His love for her still burns.

She knows one day they’ll light the way  
For her love’s safe return.  
So every night she strikes a match  
To let the candles burn.



**“Roadie Dad”**  
by H.B. Berlow

I thought I’d be cool. You know, impress my fourteen year old daughter with something she and her friends could appreciate. But I was never athletic, I really don’t get all this technology, and there is no one really famous that I know.

Except for James Hetfield. Yeah, the guitarist for Metallica. Years ago, we had both taken a creative writing course. He was in between gigs and considering writing children’s books. I, on the other hand, wanted to be the next Stephen King.

We kept in touch over the years but I, perhaps foolishly, gave up the opportunity for tickets when he was in the area. I’m more of a Harry Connick Jr. type of guy. But the thought struck me one night while watching “The Big Lebowski” that I could impress my daughter if I was a roadie for Metallica. I had absolutely no idea what it entailed.

I emailed James with my idea. He has kids so he understood. The plan was I was to make my way to Denver for their next concert. The band would put me through the motions of being a roadie, take plenty of photos backstage and later with the band, post them on social media, and my daughter would think I was cool.

The first problem was I looked nothing like a roadie. So, I went out and got some tattoos. Yeah, go big or go home, right? I didn’t need much to wear so I packed light. Early Friday morning, I started off on a nearly ten hour drive from Oklahoma City to Denver for their gig on Saturday night.

I was in western Kansas when the car stalled. Twice. And then wouldn’t start. I sat like a doofus in my Chuck Taylor’s, shorts, and concert t-shirt from 1989, the cutest little Samsonite carry-on in the back seat. A long haul driver brought me to Colby, Kansas, a little over halfway to my destination. The local mechanic misjudged how quickly he could get a water heater and how expediently he could install it. By late afternoon Saturday, my plan evaporated.

Driving slowly back home on Sunday, I arrived by three p.m. to the surprisingly ecstatic shrieks of my daughter. She showed me the Metallica Facebook page where James had posted “HUGE SHOUT OUT to my homie, @MattGerber, for last minute fill-in on stage crew. Love ya, BRO!” Just like that, I was cool.

Later that night, I found the e-mail he had sent on Saturday afternoon. He figured there was an issue but wasn’t going to let me down. It was just two dads looking out for each other.

Want your flash fiction to appear in *The Report*?  
Check out the website for details and rules on how to enter.  
<https://www.owfi.org/report/prompt/>

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