

# CONTEST SAVVY: ENTER AND WIN!



## WHY SHOULD I ENTER A CONTEST?

- A. Your contest entry is an investment in your career.
- B. Contest entries improve your writing skills.
- C. Any award can be publicized on social media and boost your name recognition.
- D. If your manuscript wins an award, that information will enhance your presentations in one-sheets and pitches.
- E. Contest entry fees are tax-deductible business expenses if you write as a professional.
- F. Contest fees support conferences and organizations that equip you, and some fees go directly to scholarships for other writers.

## HOW DO I FIND A CONTEST TO ENTER? (SEE LINKS BELOW)

- A. ACFW First Impressions, Genesis Contest, and Carol Awards
- B. Serious Writer (SW)
- C. Blue Ridge Mountains CWC (BR)
- D. Jerry Jenkins
- E. Writer's Market Guide
- F. Search online. Use these terms: writing, contest, Christian, fiction, nonfiction.

## CREATE A COMPETITIVE SUBMISSION

- A. Know your Genre
  - 1. Definitions: see common contest guidelines (ACFW, SW, BR); select the one that best matches your entry.
  - 2. Enter the correct genre.
  - 3. Know and meet the expected word count for that genre.
  - 4. If you write in multiple genres, prepare multiple entries.
  - 5. Consider the marketability of your topic. If there's a best-seller just like it, be sure your concept is original enough to stand out.
  - 6. Read AND study award-winning manuscripts.
- B. Write a synopsis or make a plot map, even if the contest doesn't require it.
  - 1. This will keep your entry on track and help you tuck tidbits of foreshadowing in fiction.
  - 2. Non-fiction book entries require an overview and chapter summaries. Don't worry, this will be useful later as you write the book and a proposal!

C. Format beautifully.

1. Use a current version of MS Word.
  - a. If your version of Word is older than 2000, consider an update.
  - b. If using a substitute word processing program, open it in a legitimate version of Word to check formatting.
2. Format margins to standard one-inch settings.
3. Use Times New Roman 12-point font. Period. End of story.
4. Use a pagination setting that does not put the number on the title page. Page 1 should be the first page of your story, especially if page length is a determining factor for your entry. If you don't know how, email me for a free template.
5. Use the paragraph command for .5" indentions. DO NOT TAB!
6. Watch for widows/orphans. If you need to move text to the next page, don't use multiple "enters." Insert a page break.
7. If you don't know about formatting, watch my two videos in the SW Writer's Chat archives at the links shared below.
8. Don't use special fonts or colors. Use italics or underlining only if absolutely necessary, and then only sparingly.

D. Write well.

1. In both fiction and non-fiction, use strong verbs and brutally cut passive voice.
2. Write to a satisfying mini-conclusion. "Cheat" your true manuscript, if necessary. Don't stop at a place that makes no sense.
3. Fiction Tips
  - a. Begin with action.
  - b. Avoid backstory.
  - c. Keep to main characters only: hero, heroine, villain, and only one or two secondary characters.
  - d. Include the "inciting incident" in the first five pages.
  - e. Pay attention to POV shifts.
  - f. Meet genre expectations
4. Non-Fiction Tips
  - a. Don't spend words writing about yourself or your motivations—get directly to your subject.
  - b. Include a section of narrative non-fiction. Tell a story of an event or person that illustrates your theme, and use great fiction techniques.
  - c. Don't skimp in preparation of the chapter synopses. The writing there must also shine.

E. Self-edit.

1. Watch Cyle Young's videos on *The Polished Draft*. Execute all steps.
2. Pay attention to Word's grammar and spelling suggestions. Don't ignore red, blue, or green underlining.
3. Spelling or grammar errors? Certain death.
4. Use an online editor like Grammarly or AutoCrit.
5. Be ruthless with flowery language. You don't have the luxury of extra words. If it can be cut without changing the meaning, axe it!

F. Get a critique.

1. Not your mother! Not your best friend!
2. Join a critique group. If you cannot find a local group, find an online group. *Tip: Don't miss Tracy Crump's workshop at the Kentucky CWC on critique groups.*
3. Spend the money on a paid critique with an acknowledged professional in your genre. You won't regret it.

**SUBMIT!**

- A. It is preferable to submit early in the contest cycle.
- B. Follow all instructions carefully. Don't fall into the trap of thinking "that won't apply to me." Pay special attention to email subject line requirements.
  1. Keep your submission email wording brief and professional.
  2. Two or three sentences, maximum.
  3. Do not attempt to ingratiate yourself with the contest administrator. You'll just annoy them.
- C. Most contests send a confirmation email that they have received your submission. If not, it's acceptable after a couple of days to inquire.
- D. Don't fail the "courage test." If you don't submit, you can't win.

**PREPARE TO WIN**

- A. On awards night, dress like your photo will be taken. It will!
- B. Sit near the front. The last thing you want is a long stroll down the aisle after your name has been called.
- C. Be sure you have fresh breath. You'll get a lot of hugs!
- D. When you win:
  1. Professional demeanor. No fist-pumping, at least in public (haha!)
  2. Stand up straight, tuck in your tummy, and pose like a pro for the photo.
  3. Thank the person who presents your award.
  4. Congratulate other winners, especially if you've placed first.
  5. Exchange business cards with other winners, especially those in your category.
  6. Post about your win on social media. It's not bragging—it is marketing, pure and simple.

## **POST-CONTEST STEPS**

- A. Finish and submit your work to an editor!
- B. There is no time to rest on your laurels. Contest wins are steps to success, not success itself.
- C. Write “thank you” emails to judges if invited to do so. This applies even if you didn’t win.
- D. Enter other contests.

## **IF YOU DON’T WIN**

- A. Notice – I did not say you were a loser. You just didn’t win this time. If you entered, you are already ahead of many other writers.
- B. Even though you may be disappointed, see it as practice for other challenges you will receive in the writing profession.
  - 1. Disappointment and rejection are part of this business. Accept it.
  - 2. Remember why you write. Return to your root motivation. You don’t write just to win contests—you write to be published.
  - 3. Take comfort in simple obedience to the calling God has placed upon you.
- C. Exchange business cards with winners and congratulate them.
- D. If possible, find out if you can read something the winners wrote. If anyone asks me, I direct them to my website, where excerpts of my entries can be read.
- E. Keep polishing your writing skills. Each conference/contest presents an opportunity to grow in your knowledge and ability.
- F. Polish your manuscript for the next contest, and enter again.

## HELPFUL LINKS

Find a contest: <https://thewritelife.com/writing-contests/>

ACFW: <https://acfw.com/acfw-contests>

Blue Ridge: <https://www.blueridgeconference.com/contest-info/>

Serious Writer: <https://www.seriouswriter.com/contests/>

Jerry Jenkins: <https://jerryjenkins.com/writing-contests/>

Christian Writer's Market Guide:

<https://www.amazon.com/Christian-Writers-Market-Guide-Comprehensive/dp/1621841308>

Writer's Market Guide:

<https://www.amazon.com/Writers-Market-2020-Trusted-Published/dp/1440301220/>

Email Rhonda for a free template:

[rhonda@dragomirgroup.com](mailto:rhonda@dragomirgroup.com)

Microsoft Word Secrets and Shortcuts, session one:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUkgPmFowy8>

Microsoft Word Secrets and Shortcuts, session two:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQor0oZVpy8>

*The Polished Draft* Video 1 (search YouTube with “cyle young polish draft” for others):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5uzNUYSdF0>

Grammarly: <https://www.grammarly.com/>

AutoCrit: <https://www.autocrit.com/>