

Juror Guidelines Unpublished Category

These juror guidelines cover:

1. What to look for when evaluating the quality of this year's submissions
2. How the jury process works for this award category (not the same as the published categories)
3. A timeline of essential dates.
4. Juror Scorecard – Also available in Excel format. To be filled out for every entry to determine the longlist and again for shortlist manuscripts.

Evaluating the submissions

What is a crime book?

The Awards are for excellence in *crime writing*, not just mystery writing. Mysteries are certainly a major subgenre within crime fiction, but they are by no means the only one.

Broadly speaking, you can look at a crime as any kind of offence or potential offence against the person or the wider community. Crime is at the core of a crime book, whether the premise of the book is to solve the crime, prevent the crime, perpetrate the crime, try the criminal in court, understand the criminal, etc. As long as there is (1) some kind of crime that is a major element in the book and (2) someone who has something to do with this crime – e.g., wants to solve it (whodunit), wants to prevent it (thriller), is the criminal (psychological suspense, caper), etc. – you have a crime novel. Conversely, if you can remove the crime from the story and the book can still stand on its own, the book is not a crime story.

The crime does not have to be murder. There are plenty of crimes that are not, such as, theft, fraud, and terrorism. Moreover, the setting can be anywhere and any time in history; you can even have a crime novel set in a fantasy or science fiction world.

Please consider each manuscript on its own merits. There is no reason why an excellent cozy or humorous mystery shouldn't win the best unpublished manuscript award. An award-winning manuscript does not have to contain a message, nor does it have to change the reader's life. It must, however, be well-written and well-executed, and an exemplar of a manuscript in its subgenre, whether it's a police procedural, a thriller, a traditional mystery, a caper, or a cozy.

Points to consider:

- Does the book fulfill the “promise” it makes to the reader? This promise may range from illuminating the dark side of human nature to providing a rollicking entertaining read, but the reader should feel satisfied when they shut the book.
- Does the author balance show and tell (action versus exposition)? Does the author involve the reader in the characters’ lives and actions?
- Is the puzzle or central problem presented in the book interesting and challenging?
- Is there an internal logic/consistency, and believability to all the elements (plot, characters, dialogue, facts, etc.) of the book? Do all the elements hold together and make the book greater than the sum of its parts?
- Does the book have a spark that elevates it above other similar books? Is the book memorable (in a good way)?
- How ready is the manuscript for publication?

Jury Process

All submissions will be in digital PDF format with the author’s details removed and will be accessible through a Dropbox account. The Awards Manager will email jurors with the access details. A scorecard system is used to determine the longlist, shortlist, and jury consultation(s) will determine the winner.

There are three rounds of manuscript evaluation:

- Jurors read only the first 5,000 words of each submitted manuscript, and a 500-word synopsis of the full novel. These are used to determine the longlist. Each juror fills out a scorecard for each submission and returns them all to the Awards Manager for compilation. The ten entries with the highest amalgamated scores move on to the longlist. **NOTE: All first-round scorecards must reach the Awards Manager no later than **January 12, 2026****
- Jurors are sent the full manuscripts for the longlisted novels. They will read and evaluate each manuscript (or as much as necessary to determine a novel will not qualify for a shortlist; a minimum of 1/3 is suggested). Each juror again fills out a scorecard for each entry and returns them all to the Awards manager. The five manuscripts with the highest amalgamated scores make up the shortlist.
- **NOTE: All second-round scorecards must reach the Awards Manager on or before **April 1, 2026****
- Once the shortlist of five (5) entries is confirmed, the three original Jurors will convene to collectively discuss and deliberate on the merits of each shortlisted title. No

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scorecard is used for this round. The panel will reach a consensus to determine the single winning title. The panel will also be responsible for drafting a 150-word summary that captures the collective view of all jurors on why the winning title was chosen. A single winner is selected for the Best Unpublished Crime Novel award.

- **NOTE:** Jurors are encouraged to write brief scorecard comments on what was done well and add a gentle suggestion about something that could be improved. Please keep scorecard comments constructive as participants will see them.
- **NOTE:** If there is any identifying information in the body of the manuscript, notify the Awards Manager immediately.

Essential Information:

1. In the event of a tie in the top five scores, a jury discussion by phone or online in early April will decide the tiebreaker for the entries involved in the tie only.
2. No author or character should be dismissed because of gender, culture, religion, or origin.
3. Jurors are not to post about or discuss publicly the submissions.

Critical Timeline

- **November 15, 2025** - The Unpublished submissions of 5,000 words and synopsis should be available to the jurors. If you have not received your Dropbox access information by then, please contact the Awards Manager immediately.
- **January 12, 2026: the final deadline for the long list.** However, jurors are encouraged to send completed scorecards to the Awards Manager prior to the deadline, as soon as they're ready.
- Those who made the longlist will be notified the **week of January 19th, 2026**. Participants will have 1 week after notification (2 if there are special circumstances) to submit their full manuscript. Jurors will be informed when longlisted entries are available in the Dropbox, generally no later than **January 30**.
- **April 1, 2026: Deadline for all jurors to submit their scorecards for the shortlist and winner.** All scorecards should be sent to the Awards Manager. However, jurors can send them to the Awards Manager before April 1st if they are completed early.
- **April 24, 2026: the shortlists are announced.**
- **May 29, 2026. Winners announced.**

Communication

For all concerns regarding the judging process and the delivery of submissions, contact:

Awards Manager: Ludvica Boota, awards@crimewriterscanada.com

Alternate Contact:

Jury Selection Chair: Jayne Barnard: awardsjudging@crimewriterscanada.com



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Unpublished Scorecard - AVAILABLE IN EXCEL

Unpublished Manuscript Title:

**Score 1-10
(1 low; 10
high)**

Please briefly explain scores of 4 or lower

- 1. PLOT:** do the opening pages pull you into the story?
- 2. PLOT:** does the premise have something that makes it fresh?
- 3. PLOT:** does the plot have the potential to sustain an entire book?
- 4. PACE:** is the pace working for the story?
- 5. SETTING:** does the setting give a sense of time and place and does it fit the tone of the story?
- 6. DIALOGUE:** is the dialogue purposeful, plausible, free from info-dumping, and is it clear who's speaking?
- 7. STYLE/VOICE:** does the writing have a certain something that keeps you reading?
- 8. CHARACTERS:** are the characters compelling and are their actions and reactions believable?
- 9. POINT OF VIEW:** is the POV clear at all times?
- 10. PUBLISHABILITY:** how ready is the manuscript to be published?

Total:

Judge's Overall Comments