

## The Judges' Criteria

These elements of short fiction should receive consideration in one's writing:

|                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| overall structure of story | dialogue/narration            |
| plot                       | diction                       |
| place                      | compelling interest           |
| scene                      | overall balance               |
| mood                       | overall effect of the various |
| characterization           | elements                      |

Below are the scoring standards developed by the judges for the Literary Contest. We hope this information will help students and teachers identify specific weaknesses in manuscripts prior to submission.

### **9-10: "Practically Perfect"**

- Original with compelling interest - reader does not feel that s/he has read this story before
- Point of View Consistent Throughout - no unintentional changes
- Narrative Tension/Suspense—unpredictable outcome fully developed by subtle foreshadowing
- Characters - convincing and developed with their authentic voices
- Situation - plausible, well-developed plot/place/ scene, at least within the context of the story
- Dialogue/Narration—believable; may reveal character/background/necessary information/insight into relationships without too much exposition; moves the story forward
- Focus - on a single idea, character, situation
- Language Use - precise, apt, descriptive (and generally understated)
- Tone and Mood - consistent
- Transitions - smooth
- No Major Errors - in mechanics/grammar/usage (except for character's voice if appropriate)
- Overall structure/balance/ effect of elements--complete with nothing left dangling

### **7-8: "Better than average but having a major flaw or weakness"**

- Positive qualities greatly outweigh negative
- Engages readers'/judges' attention
- Overall structure/balance/effect of elements—major weakness needs careful rethinking/revision

### **5-6: "Average; undistinguished"**

- Well-written but derivative/imitative in idea and content-- reader feels like s/he has read it before
- Characters/situation-- stereotypical and/or trite
- "Borrowed" plot and dialogue--do not reflect the writer's perspective/experience
- Predictable outcome

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### **3-4: "Weak with one or two redeeming characteristics"**

- One or two redeeming qualities
- Story not "fixable" but demonstrates some ability—writer should be encouraged

### **1-2: "Severe Weaknesses"**

- Demonstrates lack of understanding of concept of story and requirements for modern readers
- Some possible problems:
  - Plot—Trite/unintentionally nonexistent- may not be a story at all, but a simple incident
  - Characters/Ideas – Flat/unconvincing/undeveloped/ introduced for no apparent reason
  - Language – either simplistic or grandiose
  - Point of view – unintentionally inconsistent; unclear as to whose story is being told
  - Dialogue – serves no purpose other than to take up space
  - Narrative Tension/Suspense/Plot/Conflict/Obstacle lacking (character "ponders" through)
  - Transitions – rough scenes disconnected
  
  - Major errors –so extensive in grammar, mechanics and usage as to detract from the story
  - Lack of focus – purpose/direction of the story never clear