

All One Document
September Write Brain
Presenter: Dawn Smit Miller
By Cathy Dilts

Writers planning to enter the 2010 PPW Fiction Contest received insider tips at the September Write Brain. Contest director Dawn Smit Miller hammered home the importance of submitting “all one document.”

For the first time, the contest has gone entirely electronic, partly to save postage and paper costs. Dawn also cited past instances where hardcopies went astray in the postal system.

Judges will receive only electronic copies, and will mark manuscripts using computer editing and mark-up features. Send your synopsis and manuscript as a single attached RTF document, NOT as separate files—all one document.

Page count no longer matters, but if you go over the word count there may be dire consequences, including chopping off your entry mid-sentence.

If you plan to labor feverishly on your submission until the wee hours of November 14, think again. There are incentives for entering before the deadline! “If you get your contest entry in seven days before the deadline,” Dawn told the audience, “we will check your entry.” Time permitting, she and Chris will notify entrants of basic errors they can correct that might otherwise disqualify them from the contest, such as leaving your name on your manuscript.

Dawn handed out blank judging score sheets and reviewed each category in detail. She shared advice she gives the judges for scoring manuscripts, then gave a mini workshop on fiction writing techniques.

Dawn’s advice on writing The Dreaded Synopsis was to tell someone your story in ten minutes. “Then tell it in five, and tape it.” The synopsis is not an outline and should not be told chapter by chapter. It’s a narrative, and includes “not just what happened, but why.”

Chris Scena, contest coordinator, said the contest judges are not just “pulled off the street.” They meet criteria such as a demonstrated ability to critique. An effort is made to have one published author judge each entry, and finalists will be judged by VIP judges—agents and editors. If you have an issue with a judge, Chris asked that you let him know as soon as possible.

Entering a fiction contest is fraught with emotional turmoil. M.B. Partlow closed the workshop with advice about dealing with contest results and judges’ comments. “Set it aside for six months,” then review it again. Time puts things in perspective.

The rules, entry form, timeline, and more are available on the PPW Web site. Chris encouraged writers to use the helpful checklist. “If you’re not sure,” Chris said, “ask!”

Resources:

- Contest questions? Contact Dawn or Chris at pgcontest@gmail.com
- *Writing the Fiction Synopsis* by Pam McCutcheon
- *GMC: Goal, Motivation, and Conflict* by Debra Dixon

Tips:

- Thank-you notes may be e-mailed to your judges.
- Read the rules. Follow the rules.
- Use the checklist.
- Send your entry seven days before the deadline and Dawn or Chris will check it for basic errors.
- “All one document”: Send your manuscript and synopsis as one RTF document.
- Stay within the word count!

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