

PPW Zebulon Writing Contest Scoresheet – 2020 Update

Genre: Any

Category: Short Story

Scoring:

- 5 = Outstanding; of publishable standard
- 4 = Good; above average; needs minor rewrites
- 3 = Average; needs some revision
- 2 = Fair; some elements missing; shows promise • 1 = Recommend significant rewrite.
- 0 = Element is completely absent.

A note on scoring: Only if an element is entirely missing should it receive a score of 0. In all other cases, the minimum score should be 1, "Recommend significant rewrite."

The Opening Scene

1. HOOK. Is the opening scene compelling? Does it make you want to read more?
2. SETTING. Does the author provide a sense of time and place (without overdoing the description)?
3. PROBLEM. Does the opening introduce the conflict and/or themes of the book? Does the story start in the right place?

Characterization

4. CHARACTERS. Is the main character interesting and/or sympathetic? There should only be one for a short story. Is he/she multidimensional, with weaknesses and strengths at least implied? Secondary characters don't have to be well developed, but do they enter the plot naturally and unobtrusively? Are they believable and necessary? If there are no secondary characters, is this a logical and reasonable beginning for this particular story? (If so, give the entrant 3, 4, or 5 points. Do not penalize them unduly.)
5. CHARACTER VOICE. Is each character's voice consistent? Is the voice appropriate for his/her age, background, education, ethnicity, social standing, etc.?

Dialogue and Narrative

6. BALANCE. Do dialogue and narrative flow together seamlessly? Or does one unnecessarily dominate the other?

7. DIALOGUE. Does it read naturally for the time and place? Does it reveal information and personality about the characters? Does it move the story forward? Does it avoid obvious and awkward info dumps?
8. NARRATIVE. Does it move the story forward? Does it avoid unnecessary exposition and info dumps?

Pacing and Conflict

9. PACE. Does the story move along at an appropriate pace for the genre via language, dialogue, and action? Does sentence structure and length vary?
10. FLOW. Does each scene have a clear relationship to the scenes that precede and follow it? Do scene breaks make sense, or do they leave the reader confused about where and/or when they are?
11. CONFLICT. Is the conflict compelling to the reader as well as forcing the character into action? Is the conflict appropriate for the type of story/genre? Does the character try to resolve the conflict in a compelling manner?
12. PLOT. Is it plausible? Is there enough initial conflict, intrigue, and momentum in the submission to pull the reader into the book?

Style and Technique

13. WORD STRENGTH. Does each word have the more weight than in a novel? Less words means each is written with more care, delivers more plot, and remains necessary to move the story forward.
14. MOOD/TONE. Does the feeling or atmosphere created evoke the appropriate response in the reader? (For example: sorrow, laughter, sympathy, fear, etc.)
15. EMOTION. Does the author connect with the reader on an emotional level? Do the characters experience appropriate emotional reactions for their situations? Are the stakes high enough? Is the emotion powerful and visceral?
16. STYLE. Is the voice interesting? Has the author avoided the overuse of adjectives and adverbs, and is the work free of cliché? (Or if the author does overuse adjectives, adverbs, and cliché, does it work well in the context of the story and voice?)
17. SENSES. Has the author used all five senses (taste, touch, sound, smell, sight) to create a clear and vivid experience?
18. SHOW AND TELL. Does the balance between showing and telling work? Is the story active instead of passive?

Genre Specific

1. APPROPRIATE CHACTERS. Are the characters age and personalities appropriate for the genre?
2. APPROPRIATE MARKET. Is the author targeting the right market for his/her genre? Do the words, dialogue, plot, and conflict resonate with the intended market?
3. APPROPRIATE THEMES. Depending on the genre, there can be more emphasis on the characters (e.g.: literary) or more emphasis on the plot (e.g. science fiction). Some themes need to be age appropriate (e.g.: Middle Grade and Young Adult). How well does the author incorporate the genre into the theme?
4. APPROPRIATE DIALOGUE. Dialog not only is tailored for age appropriate genres, but in short stories, it is even more critical that it drives the plot forward. As mentioned, words in a short story are worth more than a word in a novel, this is reflected in the dialogue.

Middle Grade and Young adult have more restrictions on profanity, maturity, and education. Is the dialogue appropriate for the genre?

Technicalities (Applies to both the synopsis and manuscript)

1. MECHANICAL. Is the submission free from mechanical errors? These include typos as well as spelling and punctuation errors.
2. GRAMMATICAL. Is the submission free of grammar errors? Or, if errors exist, do they contribute to the story and voice, or do they distract from the story?
3. RULES/FORMATTING. Was the entry presented in a professional manner, following the contest rules? This includes: double-spaced, ragged right margin, left justification (except title and chapter headings, which may be centered), one-inch margin all around, 12-pt. Courier New or Times New Roman, numbered pages, and headers optionally including title and page number but not the author name.

A total of 125 points is possible.