

Creative Writing and Poetry Judging Suggestions for the Creative Festival Coordinator

Step 1: Receiving Entries

A. Upon receiving entries from the various churches, open each package and check for any errors, such as not including identifying information, and check for missing paperwork, such as not including 4 copies of each entry or a Standard Identification form clipped to the four copies. *Double check to ensure that the grade level is typed on all 4 copies of the entry. If not, write it all copies.* Also be certain that everything agrees (i.e. grade level) with the information on the “Record of Participants” form which accompanies the entries in each package. For example, if a student’s grade is not listed anywhere, you would then need to contact the person who packaged the church’s entries to determine the student’s grade, so his or her entry could be judged. If you wait until the day of judging, you most likely will not be able to obtain this information and the student’s entry would have to be disqualified.

Note: Depending on the number of entries received, you may want to consider seeking an assistant to help with the tasks of organizing the papers, recording the final tallies, and awarding the achievement level ribbons.

B. You will need to assign a letter and number code for each entry that comes in, so that when it is sent to the judges (without the student’s name on the entry) you will still know to whom the work belongs. For example, the first box you open is from St. Nicholas Cathedral, Brooklyn. Assign the letter “A” to the cathedral and consecutive numbers to each entry from the cathedral. Using the same example, if the cathedral submitted 29 writing entries, all these entries would have the letter “A” along with a number 1-29. *The code number for that entry should be written on the Standard Identification Form and all 4 copies of the entry.* For easy reference near the end of the process, keep a separate record of the code letters used to designate each parish along with the total number of entries from each parish. *You will need to report those numbers to your Creative Festivals Chair at a later date.*

C. After you have checked and coded all entries for a particular church, return the entries and the accompanying Record of Participants Form to the box or envelope from which it came. *Keep all packaging intact, because after they are judged, all entries will need to be put back in their original boxes or envelopes and eventually taken to the Parish Life Conference where they might be displayed.*

Step 2: Securing Judges

Secure three judges, preferably two months in advance of the actual judging. If possible, try to obtain a member of the clergy from another Jurisdiction. The other judges should have some expertise in the area being judged. If possible, try to obtain lay judges who are Orthodox Christians and well-versed in writing or poetry. If this is not possible, you may use one judge who is not Orthodox, such as an English teacher, a professional writer, etc. *Three judges are ideal, but in case of emergency, or if the total number of entries is very low, judging can be conducted with only two judges.*

Step 3: Date and Location of Judging

Judging can take place any time after you have allowed time for packages to arrive (10 to 14 days after the postmark deadline) and time for you to organize all of the entries. (In most cases, it's best to schedule the judging a week or two after Pascha, unless your diocese has a later deadline or Pascha is very late that year.) You can either request that all three judges meet in one location on a particular day and time, or you can give the entries (in a package with directions and rubrics) to each judge to read at home at his or her convenience. Establish a deadline by which all entries must be scored and returned to you. Check with your Creative Festivals Chair regarding when the results of the judging should be submitted. The Chair will need time to notify the parish priests of the winners' names and award places in advance of the Parish Life Conference.

Step 4: Preparing for Judging

A. Remove entries from their packaging in order to organize them by grade level for the 3 judges to evaluate them. For example, if 14 churches submit essays/short stories, then the coordinator, after coding & recording, needs to separate all entries, no longer by church name, but by grade level from Grades 1 – 8, and depending upon the number of entries from high school students in your diocese, possibly combining Grades 9 & 10 and Grades 11 & 12 for judging purposes or place all of the high school entries in one judging level if only a few entries have been received on the high school level overall.

B. Make four piles, each with one copy of all of the writing entries. Place each pile in a separate envelope to give to each of the 3 judges and keep one copy of the grade level sets (with their Standard Identification forms attached) for you, the coordinator.

C. Make 3 copies of the judging rubric for each entry. From the record you have kept under Step 1. B., you should know how many entries you have from each parish. Add up the number of entries from each parish to obtain the total number of entries in the Festival overall. For example, if you have 50 entries and 3 judges, you will need to make 150 copies of the rubric. Remember that there are two copies of the rubric per page, so in the example mentioned above, you will need to make 75 copies of the rubric page and cut each in half to obtain 2 rubrics. If you have access to a paper cutter, you could cut multiple copies at one time. You may also want to give the judges a few extra copies in case they make an error.

D. Print 3 copies of the Creative Festival theme and logo for the judges. Also print an explanation of the theme and possible interpretations of the theme (which can be found on the sidebar of the Creative Festivals website) or direct the judges to the links on the website so they will have a better understanding of the theme in order to judge the entries.

E. Prepare a letter for the judges to explain each step they should follow in the process.
Note: There is a sample letter at the end of this document.

Step 5: Conducting the Judging

A. Explain to the judges how to complete the rubric: circle in pen the score for each category, then add the individual scores and place the total score on the bottom of each rubric (double-check the math). Have the judges begin with grade one, so they can see the progression of the students' abilities and better understand the level of proficiency at different age levels. All judging must be conducted while keeping the age of the student in mind. *Instruct judges to staple the corresponding rubric to the BACK of each entry.*

B. If the judges are mailing their packets back to you, ask that they be sent in a way so that the packages can be tracked. If mailing costs are incurred, they should be reimbursed for postage. Check with your Creative Festivals Chair to see how this is handled.

C. Purchase a small thank you gift for the judges. Check with your Creative Festivals Chair to see if this is customary in your diocese and if so, who normally pays for the gifts.

Step 6: Tallying the Final Results

A. When all 3 judges have returned the entries, you will need to tally the results. Add up the points from the three rubrics to obtain a total score. Write that student's score on the Standard Identification Form which is attached to the back of the copy you have kept. Place it on the line next to the "S" in the section labeled "For use of Festival Coordinator." *Optional: You may also want to place the total score for each entry on an Excel spreadsheet listing the code for each entry on the side and the grade level on the top. In that way, you can easily see who were the highest three scorers on each grade level.*

You will also need to circle which Achievement-Level Ribbon the student has earned based on the scoring chart below:

3 Judges

54-60 Gold

45-53 Silver

1-44 Bronze

2 Judges

35-40 Gold

30-34 Silver

1-29 Bronze

Note: In order to qualify for the top 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place award, the student must have scored in the Gold or Silver range.

B. Determine the top three scores in each grade from the excel spreadsheet or other convenient way you have developed to acquire an overview. (Keep in mind that there is the possibility of a tie). Place a post-it note on the front of the winning entries for easier identification. Create a list of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners for each grade, including the

student's full name, grade, award place, parish name, city, and state. *Retain that list of winners to email to your Creative Festivals Chair when that information is requested.*

Step 7: Recording the Judging Results and Repackaging Entries

A. After the judging has been completed, entries must now be separated by church in order to return them to their original packaging. If you've assigned a code letter to all of the entries from a particular parish (as in Step 1:B.), this will assist you in repackaging the entries. *Only include the copy of the entry with the Standard Identification Form attached, so students can see their composite score.*

B. On each parish's Record of Participants Form, circle the achievement level ribbon each student has earned. If any of the students have won 1st, 2nd, or 3rd place, write "1, 2, or 3" in the "Award Winner?" column. Then total the number of Gold, Silver, and Bronze ribbons needed for each parish, and write that number in the "Ribbon Totals" boxes. Put the Record of Participants Form back in the package. *Do not lose or throw away any Record of Participants Forms as they will contain all award information.*

C. Clearly write the parish's name, city, and state on the outside of the packaging. All packages must be taken home from the conference by the priest or other designated person

Step 8: Parish Life Conference

Bring all packages to the Parish Life Conference. Check with your Creative Festivals Chair for specific details as to whether or not entries will be displayed and how any awarding procedures will be handled.

(Note: On the next page, see a sample letter you might want to modify to send to the judges.)

(Date)

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to judge the Creative Writing (or Poetry) Festival this year. Most of the students put a great deal of effort into thinking about the topic and writing their essays or short stories, so we appreciate the time you will devote to reading and evaluating them. Enclosed are (# of) entries and copies of the rubric sheets you will need to fill out. (I've enclosed some extras in case of any errors.) This letter is an overview of the competition, deadlines, and how the writing and poetry entries are scored.

If you have any additional questions as you begin the process, feel free to email me at (address) or call me at (#). I request that you kindly complete the scoring by (date), then hand deliver or priority mail everything back to me at (address). I need to receive them by (date) in order to tabulate all 3 judges' scores, complete a report, and submit everything to the Creative Festivals Chair. The participating churches will be notified of the results prior to the Parish Life Conference which will be held (date).

First, I want to direct you to the Creative Festivals website if you'd like to read additional specifications for the festival as well as more details to understand the topic in depth. <http://www.antiochian.org/festivals/cf/eligibility> You may also want to click on some of the other sections on the sidebar under "Resources."

This year's Festival theme is (list the theme). We encourage the students to personalize some of their essays/poems in addition to explaining their understanding of the theme.

The judging procedure is as follows:

- 1) Skim quickly through all the entries to gain an overview of quality and content of submissions.
- 2) Read the rubric to clarify in what areas each entry will be scored.
- 3) Begin the actual judging with Grade One and then continue in order by grade level. In this way, you will be able to see the progression of the students' abilities as they get older and have a better understanding of the level of proficiency at different age levels. All judging must be conducted while keeping the grade level of the students in mind. In that regard, be mindful of essays/stories/poetry mostly written on a level much more advanced than expected for that grade. Children are supposed to write original essays with only minimal adult supervision. You might want to read all the entries for each grade level once without filling in the rubric, and then read them again and rate them. Further explanation of the use of rubric is below this procedure list.
- 4) Additionally, the maximum length of the entries (which should have been typed in Times New Roman, 12 font, double space) is 3 pages. No minimum is set, but children in Grades 2-4 should be able to write at least one well-developed paragraph; Grades 5-8 one page; High School 2-3 pages.
- 5) Circle (in pen) one box for each of the five categories on the Rubric. Total the score and write that number on the line (____/20). *Next to that box, write the letter and number code found on the back of the entry along with the grade level.* (Note: Non-Scorable can be used, if applicable.)

- 6) It is very important that you staple the completed rubric to the bottom half of the **back** of the entry. The front of the rubric should be visible.
- 7) Paper clip the entries together by grade level.
- 8) Return the package to me.

We arrive at the final determinations of achievement levels and winners in the following manner: I add the total from the 3 rubrics for each student. A score of 54-60 earns a Gold achievement level ribbon. A score of 45-53 earns a Silver ribbon. A score of 1 to 44 (everyone else) earns a bronze ribbon. Then within the Gold and Silver levels together, the top three scorers qualify for the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place award. In other words, hypothetically, if nobody scores a 54 to 60 but 3 students earn 45-53, those three will win 1st, 2nd, & 3rd place. (Those who receive awards must have earned at least 45 points total.) The first, second, and third place winners in each grade (or combined for HS) are the students who are recognized individually.

Please do not hesitate to contact me for further clarification. Thank you so much for your willingness to judge this competition. May God bless you for your volunteer service to our Orthodox churches' children.

Yours in Christ,