

General Guidelines for Submitting Work to the Nebraska Writers Guild

The following are general guidelines for submitting to an NWG contest or publication. Guidelines may vary per event, so please read each event's specific guidelines as they are made available.

Entry Fee:

There is a fee for submitting to the annual poetry contest. Fees may vary from year to year. Submitting to the annual publications is completely free.

Entry Requirements:

Entry requirements vary. Check the guidelines for the contest or publication you're submitting to.

Entries Defined:

The number of entries allowed varies, but you can bank on the following:

- Short stories, essays, memoirs, novel excerpts, etc. must be no longer than 5000 words.
- Flash fiction must be no longer than 1000 words.
- A single poem of any length constitutes a single entry.

Simultaneous Submissions:

Simultaneous submissions are accepted, but please let us know if an entry has been simultaneously submitted elsewhere. If an entry is accepted by another publication, you must withdraw it from consideration by the NWG (publications only; this guideline does not apply to the poetry contest).

Republications:

We do not accept previously published work *for the poetry contest or the poetry and flash fiction collections*; however, we do for the *Voices* anthology, as long as you have republication rights per your agreement with your previous publisher (obviously not an issue if that previous publisher was you).

If you are submitting an entry that has been previously published, please include the appropriate republication language at the end of your entry. Below are some suggestions:

Originally published in [name of publication], [issue number], [year], [page number].

Originally published online by [name of website/blog].

Reprinted with permission by [name of previous publisher].

NOTE: Republications must be submitted with a letter from the original publisher giving permission for reprint, or you should provide proof that you retain or have regained publishing rights.

Appropriate Content:

Regardless of whether you're submitting to a contest or a publication, mature content and questionable language should be appropriate and not excessive or gratuitous in nature. We are not likely to accept explicit content. ***Content which supports or attempts to spread racism or other intolerance will not be accepted.***

Formatting:

Do not include the author's name anywhere in your files. Any entries including the author's name will be disqualified.

We do not have any particular requirements regarding font, size, or line spacing. However, most publications require 12pt Times New Roman, 1.5 line spacing, so it's not a bad idea to get into the habit of saving your files with these settings.

Also note the following:

- **Acceptable File Formats:** .docx, .pdf, .pages, .rtf, Google Docs
- **Poetry:**
 - Long lines of poetry may break mid-line to accommodate the size of the book. Check the guidelines for the book you're submitting to, and adjust your line lengths accordingly.
 - Use *only one* blank line between stanzas (even if that causes a stanza to break across two pages).
- **Fiction/Nonfiction:**
 - Do not add extra returns between paragraphs.
 - Do not use tabs or spaces to indent paragraphs (set a first-line indent instead).
 - If you need a visual break between sections, please add a line of asterisks (* * *) or some other symbol so the break is easy to distinguish and understand.
- **General Formatting:**
 - Titles should use initial caps only, not all caps.
 - Do not add extra built-in space above or below paragraphs ("space above"/ "space below").
 - Use *only one space* after periods and colons. (This is publishing industry standard and is a good habit to get into when writing for publication.)
- No illustrations, images, or emoticons please.

Author Bio:

We request a bio for the *Voices* anthology. A few key things to note about writing a bio:

- We have a 50-word limit.
- Bios are generally written in third person.
- A bio can list your professional accomplishments, describe your hobbies, mention your family and where you live, or simply make random, perhaps silly, comments about you.
- Sample Bio (48 words):

John Doe is a lawyer with a heart (who knew?!) who loves to write poetry on the weekends. John has been published in several anthologies, including the *Whatseewhosit Anthology* and *Anthology of Something or Other*. John lives in Omaha, Nebraska, with his wife and three kids, er, dogs.

Editing:

- Entries for publication are *not edited*. They are, however, proofread for errors and to ensure that spelling, punctuation, capitalization, etc. follow our anthology formatting guidelines. Note that careful attention is given to ensure that changes are not made that would interfere with the author's intent.
- Authors are given a chance to review most of the changes before they are made.
- Punctuation and other style considerations follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 17th edition. Spelling follows the *Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary*.
- The NWG accepts no responsibility for any errors occurring in original entry files that happen to get printed, so authors are highly encouraged to proofread their entries carefully before submitting.

NOTES:

- Entries can only be withdrawn in the case of simultaneous submissions (see above).
- No revisions (except proofreading changes) will be allowed after an entry is received.
- *Evaluators may disqualify any work for violating any and all requirements listed above.*

As always, we encourage you to ask any questions you have. Knowledge is power!

The NWG has multiple email accounts set up that you can reach out to; however, please note that not all accounts are monitored year-round. If you receive an auto-reply to your email, go to the NWG website and reach out via the Contact Us page.

[nwqpoetrycontest@gmail.com](mailto:nwgpoetrycontest@gmail.com) (re: poetry contests)

[nwqpoetrycollection@gmail.com](mailto:nwgpoetrycollection@gmail.com) (re: poetry published collections)

nwqflashfiction@gmail.com (re: flash fiction published collections)

voicesfromtheplains@gmail.com (re: annual published anthology)

<https://nebraskawriters.org/who-we-are/contact.html> (NWG Contact Us page)

Essential Elements of Essays

An essay is an analytical piece of writing that endeavors to make an argument or to impart information about a particular subject. Remember those five-paragraph essays in high school? Well, essays don't have to be restricted to five paragraphs, and they don't have to follow the strict form that English teachers look for, but there are some aspects of essay writing that are fairly universal.

Elements of essays include:

1. **Thesis Statement** — The thesis statement tells the readers what the author is going to attempt to inform them about or prove to them. The thesis usually appears in the introductory paragraph but may appear elsewhere if a strict form is not being followed.
2. **Focus** — The topic should be very specific and not at all broad or general. For example, you may want to write an essay about instant replay in sports, but don't just describe what it is. Focus the topic on the impact instant replay has on sports, whether positive or negative in your opinion, and drill down into that topic. Also, just like the essay itself, each paragraph should focus on one supporting aspect of the topic.
3. **Organization** — Essays cannot ramble. They must be well organized and easy to follow. Most essays include an introduction, supporting ("body") paragraphs, and a conclusion. To further our example from above, you may write an essay in which you're trying to persuade readers that instant replay is ruining sports. Your introduction presents your argument and your thesis, each body paragraph presents one supporting aspect of your argument, and your conclusion wraps it all up.
4. **Definite Purpose** — Essays don't have to be serious, nor do they have to be about dry topics. But they do have to have a definite purpose, which may be to inform, to persuade, to describe (e.g., a person or place), to relate (e.g., an event), or to compare and contrast two or more things or ideas.
5. **Author's Perspective** — Essays should not just give generic information like a textbook. They should impart the author's perspective about the topic, even if the purpose of the essay is simply to inform or describe. Your perspective should be part of the focus of the topic. For example, don't just write a generic piece about the building of the Louvre Pyramid. Incorporate your opinion about the pyramid's being an inspirational combination of art and architecture or your opinion about the pyramid's being nothing but a glass monstrosity. You can still give all those generic facts, but with a twist that makes your essay unique.

NOTE: The above elements may seem to indicate that all essays must follow a strict form, but that's not the case. While the traditional five-paragraph essay uses a prescribed layout, your essay might not. Form can deviate from the norm as long as all the other elements are there.

Read more about how to write essays:

<https://literarydevices.net/elements-of-an-essay/>

<https://penandthepad.com/elements-essay-writing-7875213.html>

Essential Elements of Flash Fiction

Even though flash fiction is very short, it should still tell a story, have interesting characters, and thoroughly engage readers. The essential elements of flash fiction may vary somewhat depending on who you ask, but just about everyone agrees on the following list. The general consensus is that flash fiction needs to have impact—a lot of it. The elements below will help you achieve just that.

Elements of flash fiction include:

1. **A Focused Plot** — Despite the length of flash fiction, the stories must still feature a discernible plot or, at the very least, a discernible purpose, and that plot must be sharply focused. There is simply no time for rambling plots and subplots. Pick a purpose and laser-focus on it.
2. **Strong Characters** — You don't have much time for character development and description, so your characters (and there should be *very few of them*) must be immediately interesting and distinct.
3. **Rich Language** — Again, you can't waste words making lengthy descriptions or beating about the bush. Using imagery, metaphor, and symbolism will help build amazing worlds and characters and get across complex ideas and themes without gobbling up precious space. Colorful, rich, poetic language is the flash fiction writer's best friend!
4. **Conflict** — As with any story, conflict is key. Conflict creates the opportunity for growth and change. Plus it keeps readers interested. Conflict can be internal or external, real or imagined, but it absolutely must be there.
5. **Solid Ending** — Many flash stories end with a twist, which is always fun for readers. But while a *surprise* ending is not required, a *damn good ending* is essential. Your ending should leave readers thinking, perhaps even wanting more. After all the work you did on the other four elements, don't skimp on your chance to make a lasting impression.

Read more about how to write flash fiction:

<https://indiesunlimited.com/2015/05/28/five-flash-fiction-elements/>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/writing-101-what-is-flash-fiction-learn-how-to-write-flash-fiction-in-7-steps#3-characteristics-of-flash-fiction>

<https://writersedit.com/fiction-writing/the-ultimate-guide-to-flash-fiction-and-how-to-write-your-own/>

<https://self-publishingschool.com/flash-fiction/>

Essential Elements of Memoir

Memoir is a type of real-life narrative nonfiction that differs from autobiography in that memoir is specific to a central lesson or theme, whereas autobiography is the complete story of the author's life thus far. If you've written a short piece about your life, it's definitely memoir, not autobiography (it's tough to fit an entire lifetime in under 5000 words).

Elements of memoir include:

1. **Central Lesson or Theme** — While even a short memoir may contain a variety of experiences, each experience described should connect to the central lesson or theme. For example, the lesson may be how you learned to stand on your own two feet or how you found the courage to overcome addiction. The theme could be surviving abuse or finding professional success and fulfillment.
2. **Author's Voice** — Your memoir should be told in your unique voice. This is not the time to try to sound like every other author or to fit into some sort of genre-specific mold. It's your story, and it should be told in your voice. In fact, that's exactly what readers want. Just ensure that the voice is authentic, consistent, and easy to understand.
3. **Conflict/Obstacles** — A great memoir, like any story, includes conflict and obstacles that the protagonist (a.k.a., you) must overcome. Conflicts can be character related (e.g., an abusive parent, an overly demanding coach, a misogynistic boss), situation related (e.g., surviving nature, struggling to get an education, trying to shatter the glass ceiling), or personal (e.g., trying to overcome self-doubt, addiction, or an eating disorder).
4. **Emotional Journey** — Memoirs are not simple retellings of events. Save that for your autobiography. Memoirs tell the story of a life in all its grit and glory, sarcasm and silliness, and heartache and heroism. Help your readers feel what you felt.
5. **Narrative Style** — Your memoir tells your story, so it should be written using all the elements of storytelling that “experts” keep trying to beat into you—character and plot development, active language, sense of time and place, secondary characters and subplots, consistent POV, and show, don't tell, among others. Make sure you tell your story in a fully realized, engaging, and immersive way.

Read more about how to write a great memoir:

<https://selfpublishing.com/how-to-write-a-memoir/>

<https://nybookeditors.com/2016/03/how-to-write-a-memoir-that-people-care-about/>

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/breaking-down-the-key-elements-of-a-memoir>

<https://www.writersdigest.com/improve-my-writing/elements-of-an-effective-arc>

<https://thewritelife.com/how-to-write-a-memoir/>

Essential Elements of Miscellaneous Nonfiction

For our purposes, “nonfiction” is used to refer to any writing that is factual but does not qualify as a memoir or an essay. That’s a wide-open field of possibilities and is difficult to narrow down to five common elements, but here goes...

NOTE: Before you decide to categorize your piece as simply “nonfiction,” make sure it doesn’t qualify as an essay. Check out our “Elements of Essays” to help you decide.

Elements of nonfiction include:

1. **A Central Topic** — This could be the subject of a biography, recipes, how to build or make or do something, and so forth. It could also be an idea or belief. The central topic must be very obvious, and everything in the piece must revolve around it (hence the term “central”).
2. **A Clear Goal Regarding the Central Topic** — Perhaps your goal is to teach, inform, or persuade. This goal must be very clear to readers. If your piece is an excerpt from a book or other larger work, then the goal must be obvious even though you won’t actually achieve it within this excerpt. If your piece is complete (has a beginning, middle, and end), then the goal must be realized.
3. **Supported Facts** — Your nonfiction piece should feature *facts* that are supported with either your own experiences or well-documented research, and any sources should be cited properly with footnotes or endnotes.
4. **Real-World Relevance** — The topic of your nonfiction piece should be relevant in some way to people’s lives, at least to those people who are interested in the topic (universal relevance is nearly impossible to establish and definitely not required). What gives your piece value? Why should readers want to read it?
5. **Compelling Language** — Even a piece about how to build a shed can be interesting if it’s written that way. Dry, tedious language is no fun in fiction, and it has no place in nonfiction either. The language used should be interesting and rich, not pedantic and preachy. Don’t be shy about using metaphor and robust descriptions. Make your readers *want* to learn about the mating habits of cockroaches or the economic impact of electric vehicles (well, you can at least *try* to make them want to learn it).

Read more about how to write nonfiction:

<https://writingtipsoasis.com/5-crucial-elements-which-nonfiction-writing-must-have/>

<https://www.authorlearningcenter.com/writing/nonfiction/w/elements/7028/5-key-elements-of-a-good-book-nonfiction>

Essential Elements of Excerpts from Novels

This is tricky, because there are many elements to a good novel, and most of them cannot be fully established in an excerpt that is, at most, only 10% of the completed story. So what makes for a good novel excerpt? Below are the elements our judges look for.

Elements of novel excerpts include:

1. **A Clear Plot Foundation** — While the full plot cannot possibly be revealed, a solid foundation needs to be laid. Readers should be able to tell that the story has a distinct direction in mind (although note that it's OK if the plot indicated is a red herring, as is often the case in genres like mystery and suspense/horror). The bottom line, some indications of a plot must be apparent. Hints at subplots are OK too as long as they don't cause confusion.
2. **Dynamic Characters** — An excerpt likely won't introduce all the main characters, and it certainly won't flesh out all those characters, but it should clearly demonstrate that the characters featured are dynamic and interesting and worth getting to know. Readers should walk away from the excerpt wanting to know them better.
3. **Creativity** — How deep your creativity runs can only be fully evaluated on the completed novel, but your excerpt should showcase your abilities to be original, imaginative, and descriptive. Does it feel predictable? Is the language tired and cliché? Or do the story and the language feel fresh and new? Note that trope-heavy writing may not fare well here unless those tropes are presented in a unique way.
4. **Style/Tone** — These elements are grouped together because they're interrelated. Your style and the tone it creates are essential elements to anything you write but are perhaps even more important in a novel excerpt that is meant to entice readers to want the rest of the story. If your horror excerpt isn't suspenseful or your romance excerpt doesn't evoke swooning or your fantasy excerpt isn't, uh, fantastical, readers won't trust that the rest of the book will be either. Your style and the resulting tone must match the genre and the story you're trying to tell.
5. **A Good Hook** — After reading your excerpt, readers should feel compelled to read the rest of the book. They should want to know what's going to happen, which means that you have to grab them with a good, strong hook. It may be a character or an action or a mystery or a conflict or . . . you get the idea. As the Blues Traveler song says, "The hook brings you back." Make sure your novel excerpt has a good one.

As a side note, be aware that a novel excerpt does not have to be from the *beginning* of the book. Your best match for the elements above might be in chapter seventeen, and that's OK. As long as readers can follow the passage you've chosen to share, then share away!

More about writing novels:

<https://www.writerswrite.co.za/the-7-critical-elements-of-a-great-book/>

<https://www.creative-writing-now.com/elements-of-a-novel.html>

<https://thewritelife.com/elements-of-a-novel/>

Essential Elements of Poetry

There are many types of poetry, some very long, some very short. It can be difficult to see how a haiku could possibly have anything in common with an epic poem like *The Iliad* or a Shakespearean sonnet. But there are some things that all (good) poetry has in common, and none of them are meter or rhyme. Poetry is generally measured by the language used and responses it evokes. We're big on originality too.

Elements of poetry include:

1. **Language/Imagery** — Does your poem use rich, unique language? Does it use repetition of sounds to create a unique rhythm? Does your poem paint a vivid picture? Do you use metaphor, simile, personification, anthropomorphism, etc. to bring your descriptions to life? Consider this gem from Robert Browning: "Take away love and our earth is a tomb." Does your poem use imagery this effectively?
2. **Emotional/Intellectual Response** — Poetry should move the reader in some way, be it reverie, sadness, fear, joy, amusement, anger, or whatever other emotion you're going for. However, not all poetry is meant to evoke an immediate or overwhelming emotional response. In those cases, your poetry must make readers think, to consider, to ponder. Poetry is like a great meal. You sit down with it, savor it, consider its ingredients, and wonder how different it may have been if the chef had made other choices (even though you love it just the way it is). In other words, great poetry leaves readers feeling *and* thinking.
3. **Voice** — Does your author's voice come through? One of the hallmarks of great poetry is the personal connection to the author, which means readers should be able to detect something of who you are through your words, images, thoughts, opinions, etc. Generic poetry has no connection to the author, no voice. Make sure your voice comes through loud and clear.
4. **Theme** — Great poetry has something to say, usually connected to some big idea. And by big idea, we mean something impactful. The theme does not have to be universal or popular or global. But it should have some weight to it, whether it's a big topic, a strong experience, a bold opinion, or even a small topic/experience/opinion told in a big way. Your poem should have a clear theme and purpose.
5. **Originality** — The topic doesn't have to be unique, but something about the poem should be. It might be the presentation, the perspective, the language, the rhythm, the imagery. What makes your poem different? What makes your poem stand up and shout, "I gotta be me!"

Read more about writing great poetry:

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/how-to-write-poetry#11-rules-for-writing-good-poetry>

<https://self-publishingschool.com/how-to-write-a-poem/>

<https://blog.usejournal.com/the-delicate-craft-of-writing-poetry-1e0d6020ded0>

<https://writersrelief.com/2013/12/04/8-signs-youve-written-good-poem/>

Essential Elements of Short Story

Short stories are not just mini novels, even if the key elements of both are essentially the same. The way plot, character, etc. are handled in short stories is really quite different, because there simply isn't enough time to do everything a novel can. Still, short stories are *stories*, and some important elements must be achieved to keep readers glued to the page, however briefly.

Elements of short stories include:

1. **Discernible Plot or Purpose** — Not all short stories have an actual plot. Consider character-driven day-in-a-life stories, for example. But every short story should have either a well-developed, easy-to-follow plot or a well-defined purpose (e.g., examination of character). Also, keep the subplots to a minimum. Short stories heavy with subplots are likely to be incomplete and confusing and probably should be expanded into novels.
2. **Strong Characters** — By strong, we mean characters with well-defined, easy-to-distinguish qualities and personalities. They can be weak people, but that weakness should not be subtle. You don't have time to develop characters slowly, so readers need to meet them and get to know them quickly. Short stories are often character driven, so presenting readers with fully-formed characters from the get-go is a must.
3. **An Appropriate Setting** — It may seem like there isn't time to mess with setting in a short story, but don't skimp on this important element. The setting can create atmosphere, set the tone, and even act as another character. You don't necessarily need to spend time describing the setting. What matters is how the setting influences your characters. The question is, is your story set at the right time and in the right place to make your story as effective as possible?
4. **Conflict** — As always, don't leave out the conflict, whether internal or external. Your main character needs to have a problem to solve (or to at least *try* to solve—conflict is required; conflict resolution is not). Conflict can be big or small, overt or subtle, but it needs to be there and readers need to be able to tell what it is.
5. **Literary Devices** — Because of the limitations of length, and because it's just good practice, use of literary devices—like metaphor, imagery, bold word choices, and foreshadowing—can help build the story faster, further engage readers, and craft a full world in fewer words. This is why poets are often excellent short story writers. Use literary devices to describe people and places, to build tension, and to bring actions to life.

More resources for writing great short stories:

<https://blog.lulu.com/4-elements-of-great-short-stories/>

<https://medium.com/swlh/the-5-elements-of-a-short-story-6743bcdb35d6>

<https://blog.papertrue.com/5-key-elements-of-successful-short-stories/>

<https://thewritepractice.com/successful-story-elements/>

<https://www.blurb.com/blog/what-is-a-short-story/>

<https://literarydevices.net>