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Grants & Awards: The Writing Contest Newsletter

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GRANTS & AWARDS

THE WRITING CONTEST NEWSLETTER

WRITING CONTESTS | RECENT WINNERS | CALENDAR | SUBMISSION TRACKER

Welcome to **Grants & Awards: The Writing Contest Newsletter**, your weekly guide to everything you need to know about writing contests, including upcoming deadlines, advice and insights from judges and recent winners, a look inside notable contests, and more.

You're receiving this newsletter as an exclusive premium for subscribers of *Poets & Writers Magazine*. We hope you enjoy our weekly dispatches from the world of writing contests. If you'd like to share comments or suggestions, please e-mail us at editor@pw.org.

UPCOMING DEADLINES

You have two weeks to prepare your submissions to the following opportunities with a deadline of **November 1**. As always, read the complete guidelines carefully before you submit—and good luck!

African Poetry Book Fund Evaristo Prize for African Poetry

A prize of \$1,500 is given annually for a group of poems by an African poet who has not published a full-length collection. Writers who were born in Africa, who are nationals or residents of an African country, or whose parents are African are eligible. Entry fee: None.

American Academy in Rome Rome Prize

Half-term and full-term fellowships of \$16,000 and \$30,000 respectively are given annually to artists, academics, and creative writers, including poets, fiction writers, and creative nonfiction writers, to support the development of a project. In addition to a stipend, the fellows are each provided with meals, a private workspace, and a bedroom with a private bathroom as they join the Academy's residential community on the Janiculum Hill in Rome, alongside other fellows and visiting artists and scholars. All applicants, except those applying for the National Endowment for the Humanities postdoctoral fellowships, must be U.S. citizens at the time of their application. Writers who in the past six years have published a book in their respective genre are eligible. Entry fee: \$50.

Epiphany

Fresh Voices Fellowship

A prize of \$2,000 and publication in *Epiphany* is given annually for a poem or a group of poems, a work of fiction, or a work of creative nonfiction. The winner will also be offered a one-year editorial fellowship at *Epiphany*. BIPOC writers who do not have an advanced degree in creative writing and are not currently enrolled in a degree-granting program are eligible. Entry fee: None.

Fiction Collective Two

Catherine Doctorow Innovative Fiction Prize

A prize of \$15,000 and publication by Fiction Collective Two, an imprint of University of Alabama Press, is given annually for a novel, a story collection, a novella, or a novella collection. Writers who are from or are residing in the United States and who have published at least three books are eligible. Kazim Ali will judge. Entry fee: \$25.

Fiction Collective Two

Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Contest

A prize of \$3,000 and publication by Fiction Collective Two is given annually for a novel, a story collection, a novella, or a novella collection. Writers who are from or are residing in the United States and who have not previously published a book with Fiction Collective Two are eligible. Alvin Lu will judge. Entry fee: \$25.

John Updike Society

John Updike Tucson Casitas Fellowship

A prize of \$1,000 and a two-week residency at the Mission Hill Casitas that John Updike owned and worked out of in Tucson is given annually for a group of poems or a work of fiction or nonfiction. The fellowship selection committee will judge. Entry fee: None.

Malahat Review

Open Season Awards

Three prizes of \$2,000 Canadian (approximately \$1,455) each and publication in *Malahat Review* are given annually for a poem, a short story, and an essay. Entry fee: \$22.

Moment Magazine
Short Fiction Contest

A prize of \$1,000 is given annually for a story that relates to Judaism or Jewish culture or history. The winning story will be considered for publication in *Moment Magazine*. The editors will judge. Entry fee: \$25.

North American Review
James Hearst Poetry Prize

A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *North American Review* is given annually for a single poem. Danez Smith will judge. Entry fee: \$23.

North American Review
Kurt Vonnegut Speculative Fiction Prize

A prize of \$1,000 and publication in *North American Review* is given annually for a work of speculative fiction. Rachel Yoder will judge. Entry fee: \$23.

Saturnalia Books
Malinda A. Markham Translation Prize

A prize of \$2,000 and publication by Saturnalia Books is given annually for a poetry collection in translation. Translators who identify as female (including those who are assigned-female-at-birth [AFAB] nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, and intersex) and who are translating the work of a woman poet (including those who are AFAB nonbinary, genderfluid, agender, and intersex) are eligible. Entry fee: \$30.

Stanford University
Stegner Fellowships

Ten fellowships, five in poetry and five in fiction, of \$75,000 each per year to attend Stanford University's two-year creative writing program are given annually for manuscripts of poetry and fiction. The creative writing faculty at Stanford University will judge. Entry fee: \$55.

Visit the contest websites for complete guidelines, and check out the [Grants & Awards](#) database and [Submission Calendar](#) for more contests in poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and translation.

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NEW CONTEST ALERT



Poets, take note: The deadline for the **Joy Harjo Poetry Prize** from the literary magazine *Cutthroat* is just around the corner. The annual contest offers a prize of \$1,500 and publication in *Cutthroat* for a single poem. Poet Annie Wenstrup will judge. This year's winning poems will appear in *Cutthroat* Issue 30, themed Standing Up: Coping With Great National and Global Change.

Using only the **online submission system**, submit up to three poems of no more than 100 lines each with a \$25 entry fee by **November 15**. Visit the **website** for complete guidelines.

Based in Tucson and lead by Pamela Uschuk, *Cutthroat* publishes “high quality poetry and prose with an edge, especially work that leans toward humanitarian, social, and environmental issues of our times.” In addition to its annual poetry contest, *Cutthroat* runs Barry Lopez Nonfiction Prize and the Rick Demarinis Short Story Prize, which share the deadline of November 15. Visit the journal’s website for additional information.

WINNERS ON WINNING (WOW)



Jax Connelly, winner of Red Hen Press’s 2024 Quill Prose Award.

In this installment of *Winners on Winning*, essayist Jax Connelly shares some of the lessons they've learned from submitting to contests, including the cost of competition: “Most lit mags charge minor fees for regular submissions to maintain their submission platform, but contest fees tend to be much higher to cover costs for readers, judges, promotion, the prize pot, etcetera, so it’s wise to be more selective.” They go on to list some factors to consider.

Connelly is the winner of the 2024 **Quill Prose Award**, sponsored by Red Hen Press, for their essay collection, *We Have Attempted to*

Contact You and Have Failed on Several Occasions. They received \$1,000, and their book will be published by Red Hen Press in 2027. Raymond Luczak judged. The annual prize is given for a story or essay collection, a novel, a memoir, or a hybrid work of prose by a queer writer. The deadline for this year's contest is **November 30**. Andrew Lam will judge.

Connelly has been a winner or finalist in prose contests sponsored by *Prairie Schooner*, *Nowhere*, the *Pinch*, *Fourth Genre*, *New Letters*, *Boulevard*, *CutBank*, and *Black Warrior Review*. Their work has also appeared in publications such as the *Georgia Review*, *River Teeth*, the *Rumpus*, *Pleiades*, and *Pank*. They are currently working on a second essay collection, a book-length essay, and a family memoir.

What do you generally look for in a contest?

It depends on the work I'm submitting. I might focus on who's judging—whether I'm a fan of their work and I think mine might resonate with them too. Or I might pay more attention to what kind of work the contest is asking for and whether I feel my own writing [matches] that description, even if it's in a different way than they might expect. I was drawn to Quill because it's specifically for queer writers. My work is inherently queer, and not just because I am queer and I write about queer experiences. I think of queerness as a disruptive/disrupting force that is alive in more than just the literal content of a piece of writing. I'm often working in experimental prose forms and calling attention to the artifice of craft in an attempt to push back against the kind of narrative "truth" we believe we are owed when we're reading genres like nonfiction and memoir. Quill "seeks to work against the negative politics of labeling while honoring and empowering authors who identify as queer," which felt like a perfect fit for my first essay collection.

How do you know when your work is ready for submission?

I think a lot of this is gut instinct. It takes time to develop that as a writer, but if you feel like you're trying to get away with something, then you're trying to get away with something. It's not ready. Don't force it, especially not for a contest deadline. There will be another dozen contests that appeal to you in the near future, and this same one will probably come around again next year. Life is long! Sometimes the best way to improve what you're working on is to take time away from it. Take a break, then try something different. Then again, sometimes your gut is wrong. I have essays that have [been rejected] in the double digits, and obviously those weren't ready and I had to go back and revise them heavily before sending them out again. And then again, my most-rejected essay—thirty-three

rejections!—was eventually picked up, after zero revision, by one of my favorite writers at a lit mag that was foundational to my own creative writing education. You just never know. So much of publishing comes down to the tastes of individual readers and editors—what resonates with them and what doesn't.

What have you learned from submitting your writing to contests?

I would first suggest developing a kind of “code” for assessing which contests you think are worth the emotional, financial, and time investments. Most lit mags charge minor fees for regular submissions to maintain their submission platform, but contest fees tend to be much higher to cover costs for readers, judges, promotion, the prize pot, etcetera, so it's wise to be more selective. Factors you might consider here include who's judging, how much money they're offering the winner(s), whether the contest has a particular theme or constraint that aligns well with your ethos as a writer or the ethos of your work, what publication or organization the contest is affiliated with, and what type of work has won their contests in the past.

On a similar note, be careful about simultaneous submissions with contests. I'm a huge advocate for lit mags that allow simultaneous submissions, because they often take a long time to get back to you and I don't think it's realistic or fair to ask writers to sit on their best work in the meantime. But with contests it's kind of a different story. If your work advances in multiple contests at the same time, you'll have to remove it from consideration somewhere in order for it to be eligible to win somewhere else. It's disappointing for everyone involved, and you risk making editors and judges feel like you've wasted their time. Better to make those hard decisions ahead of submitting.

Do you have any advice for how to handle the ups and downs of writing contests, including the inevitable losses as well as the successes?

Expect rejection. It's the norm, even for winners. Nothing feels more personal, but it's not personal. There is just so much incredible writing out there. (On that note: Read!) One thing that might help is working on building a mental separation between writing and publishing. You are always the first witness to your own creativity, which means you're also its first validator, which means you kind of have to love the work. Not just the finished product you're thinking about submitting to a contest, but the actual process of writing itself. If that's feeding or challenging you in some kind of productive way, then I think it becomes easier to receive rejection not as a loss or a setback, but as an actively important part of your creative practice—as important as reading or brainstorming or revising. Which makes it integral to “success,” too, however you're defining that.

How do you see contests like Red Hen Press's Quill Prose Award fitting into the bigger picture of your writing career?

My first essay came out in an online lit mag almost ten years ago, and I've been working toward publishing my first book ever since, so this feels like a huge deal! My hope is that this gives me a more solid platform for not only connecting with more readers (and writers working in similar spaces and forms—reach out!) but also shifting away from publishing one-off essays and toward publishing books, plural. I've got a few in the works.

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