

This document is intended to be used in conjunction with the Official Rulebook and Evaluation Criteria, and not as a substitute for either. Download the Official Fine Arts Rulebook and the Evaluation Criteria at www.faf.ag.org/rules.cfm.

WRITING CATEGORIES

1. SHOW, DON'T TELL.

Writing is an art form. Good art helps the reader envision its message and theme through bright colors and purposeful strokes. Think of your blank page as a canvas and your words as the paint. Show the story, theme, and message of your piece – don't just tell it. In other words, remember to use your five senses: taste, feel, hear, see, smell. How does it feel? What does it sound like? SHOW your reader what they need to see. Use vibrant imagery. Don't tell me about a tree, show me the tree.

2. WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW.

Writing from a place that is familiar is not only easier for one's writing but can help convey a sense of authenticity. Again, writing is a form of art. Art conveys emotion, theme, and life. Who wants to be told about an aspect of life that the "tellers" themselves have actually never experienced or understood? When we write from what we know, an amazing connection can be created between the writer and the reader.

3. CONSIDER CAREFULLY YOUR WORD CHOICE.

Nothing in life is more powerful than words. Words hold unbelievable connotation by themselves. The effective power of word choice cannot be underestimated. For example, it's one thing to be called "smart," it's something completely different to be called a "genius." Every girl wants to be "pretty" but she'd rather be "beautiful." Why? Because there is so much more depth of meaning held in the word beautiful. Precise and carefully chosen word choice can revolutionize a piece of writing.

4. REMEMBER PUNCTUATION.

Help your reader with precise punctuation. All the rules of punctuation that apply to prose apply to poetry as well. Commas, periods and other punctuation marks go where sentence structure and clarity of meaning dictate.

5. REVISE, REVISE, REVISE.

No writer is beyond revision. Even the most prolific writers have their work revised over and over again. No one writes a final draft on the first try.

6. CHARACTERIZATION IS KEY.

People identify with people. It takes more art to create a real, complex human being than a stereotype. One of the secrets is to provide concrete details of appearance and manner that reveal attitudes, values, and beliefs. Authors create characters who are identifiable and authentic. Consider their actions, speech, thoughts, and appearance as well as how other characters respond to them.

7. CONSISTENT STYLE AND TONE.

If your narrator is a six-year-old boy, do not use words he could not understand. If a character is a drug dealer in the ghetto, he should speak like one. If you are writing a poem in a romantic style, an unseemly word or image can spoil the serious effect. Be consistent.

8. THEME.

Some poems have too little theme and lack a unifying idea, but a more common flaw is too much theme. Writers who try too hard to present a message ("war is bad"; "people of all races are equal"; "let's save the earth before it's too late") often produce heavy-handed propaganda instead of poetry, no matter how noble the message is. Good poetry often explores rather than concludes; suggests rather than preaches.

9. BE CLEAR AND CONCISE.

Don't be overly simple but be clear and concise. Nothing is worse than confused, labyrinthine prose. This includes needless writing and writing filled with more adverbs and colorful adjectives than necessary. More words do not equal better prose. At the same time, clear writing is different than simple writing. Don't simplify your ideas to make your prose clearer. Writing should have complex thoughts. Just present them clearly with the right amount of words needed. No more and no less.

10. NEVER USE THE PASSIVE WHERE YOU CAN USE THE ACTIVE.

This rule is often broken because most people don't know the difference between the active and the passive voice. Here is an example that makes it easy to understand: The man was bitten by the dog. (passive) The dog bit the man. (active) The active is better because it's shorter and more forceful.