



# How We Judge a Book

## MWSA Reviews & Awards Program

Betsy Beard  
9/15/2023



# Topics for Discussion

- Overview of the assessment process
- Content
- Style
- Visual
- Technical







# Topics for Discussion

- Overview of the Assessment process
- Content
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# Content Assessment

## FICTION GENRE

Tells a story using characters, setting, and plot.

### SUBGENRES INCLUDE:

- Historical Fiction
- Mystery/Crime
- Thriller
- Horror
- Science Fiction
- Fantasy
- Literary Fiction
- Romance







# Content Assessment

## FICTION GENRE

Fiction assessments involve questions about characters, setting, and plot.

1. Appeal/Entertainment Value
2. Organization/Length
3. Setting/Plot
4. Characters
5. Conclusion/Impact





# Content Assessment

1. **Appeal/Entertain/Value:** Fully credible, entertaining, thought-provoking, totally engrossing, engaging the reader's imagination.
2. **Organization/Lenth:** Well-organized and easy to follow. The length is appropriate for the content.
3. **Setting/Plot:** Setting is well-drawn and enhances the theme of the book. Solid story with conflict, rising action, resolution.
4. **Characters:** Well-developed without cliché: completely credible and entertaining. Readers should be able to relate.
5. **Conclusion/Impact:** The ending ties together loose ends and leaves the reader stunned, impressed, and/or wanting more



# Content Assessment

## NONFICTION GENRE

Nonfiction informs, teaches, enlightens, or entertains based on true events or discoveries.

## SUBGENRES INCLUDE:

History

Memoir

Biography

Reference

How to/Business/Self-help

Creative Nonfiction







# Content Assessment

## NONFICTION GENRE

Nonfiction assessments are about how the books inform, explain, entertain.

1. **Appeal to Intended Audience**  
(researchers, academics, how-to enthusiasts)
2. **Organization/Length**
3. **Research and Analysis/Details**  
(references, index, footnotes as needed)
4. **Value/Impact/Importance**  
(useful, thought-provoking, new)
5. **Credibility/Conclusions**





# Content Assessment

1. **Appeal to Intended Audience:** Entertaining, thought-provoking, and informative, engage the audience of those seeking knowledge.
2. **Organization:** Information is delivered in an orderly way, including a table of contents, footnotes or endnotes, indices, appendices, and bibliography, as appropriate.
3. **Research/Analysis:** Well-researched with accurate information
4. **Value/Clarity of Information:** Contains information that is consistently useful, clear, and engaging (whether the info is new or pre-existing).
5. **Credibility/Conclusions:** Is totally credible and includes useful recommendations. The author's expertise is evident throughout.



# Content Assessment

## OTHER

Books that don't fit neatly into fiction or nonfiction categories and need different questions based on specific attributes

## SUBGENRES INCLUDE:

Poetry

Anthology/Collection

Humor

Religious/Spiritual

Pictorial/Coffee Table Books

Graphic Novels/Comic Books

Children's Picture/Chapter Books

Young Adult Books





# Genres & Subcategories Webpage

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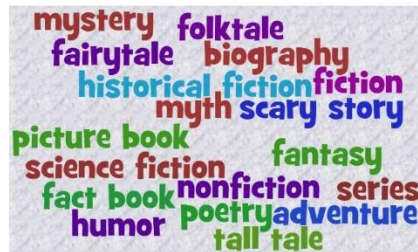
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## Reviews & Awards

- BOOK SUBMISSION
- CURRENT & PAST AWARDS SEASONS
- AWARD WINNERS
- REVIEW GENRES & SUBCATEGORIES
- ADDITIONAL DETAILS--AWARD TYPES, EBOOKS, ETC.
- WHAT'S THE STATUS OF MY BOOK?
- BECOME A REVIEWER
- CONTACT AWARDS DIRECTORS
- REVIEWERS

## Genres & Subcategories

For the purpose of assessing books submitted by our members, MWSA uses the following genres and subgenres. While there is overlap in some categories, authors are encouraged to choose the one that best fits their work. Where appropriate, we've included typical, industry-standard word counts for each category.



If you have any questions, please contact the awards directors at [mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com](mailto:mwsaawardsdirectors@gmail.com).

*Click on any category below to see the description used by MWSA in our evaluations.*

## Review

- BOOK SUBMISSION
- CURRENT & PAST AWARDS SEASONS
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[mwsadispatches.com/review-genres-subcategories](http://mwsadispatches.com/review-genres-subcategories)



# Topics for Discussion

- Overview of the Assessment process
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- Style
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# Style Assessment

The style questions evaluate readability, language, the balance of narration to dialogue, point of view, and active vs. passive voice.

1. Ease/Speed of Read
2. Redundancy/Repetition/Cliché
3. Language/Diction
4. Narration/Description/Dialog
5. Point of View/Passive Voice







# Style Assessment

1. **Ease/Speed of Read:** The book is easy to understand and engaging. Details are specific, concrete, and vivid.
2. **Redundancy/Repetition/Cliché:** Contains no redundancies in information (plot, dialogue, setting, research, or conclusions), and is free of repetitious words and phrases.  
These criteria evaluate readability, book structure, language, dialogue to narration, description to action, passive
3. **Language/Diction:** The author uses precise language in sentences that flow well.
4. **Balance:** Fiction—a blend of narration for action, description for setting, and dialogue for characters to explain thoughts/actions. Nonfiction—a blend of explanation, storytelling, pictures, tables, diagrams, maps.
5. **Point of View/Passive Voice:** Use of a consistent, discernible voice, tone, or point of view. Active voice appropriately dominates.



# Topics for Discussion

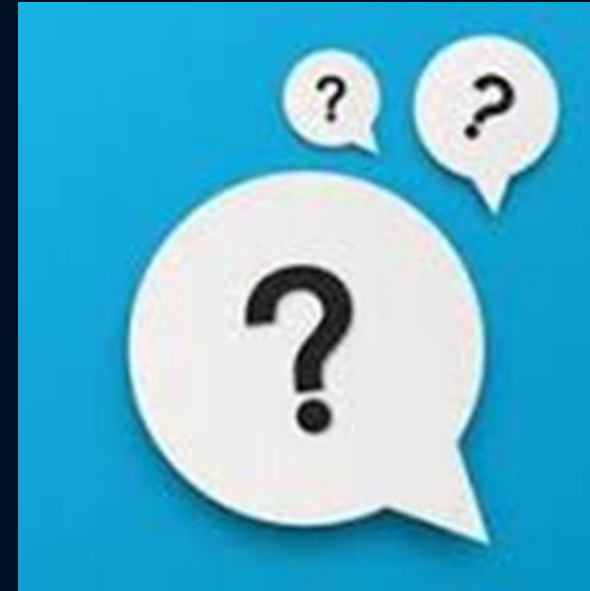
- Overview of the assessment process
- Content
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# Visual Assessment

Visual assessment covers the artistic and layout decisions of the author and designer.

1. Cover artwork
2. Cover design
3. Interior book block
4. Interior font and inclusions
5. Interior photos, maps, illustrations



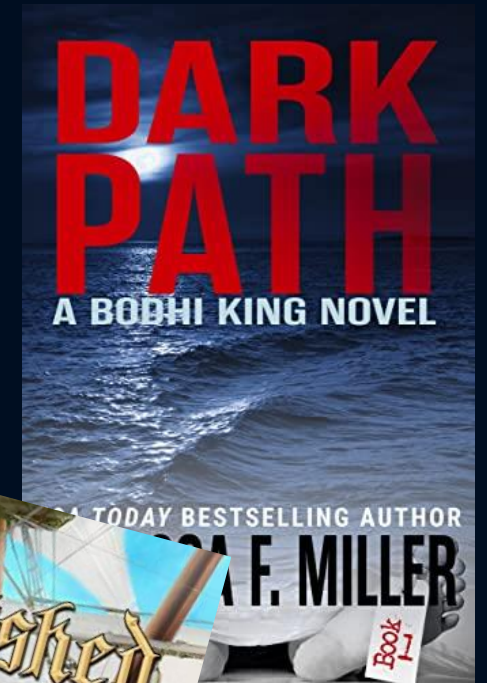
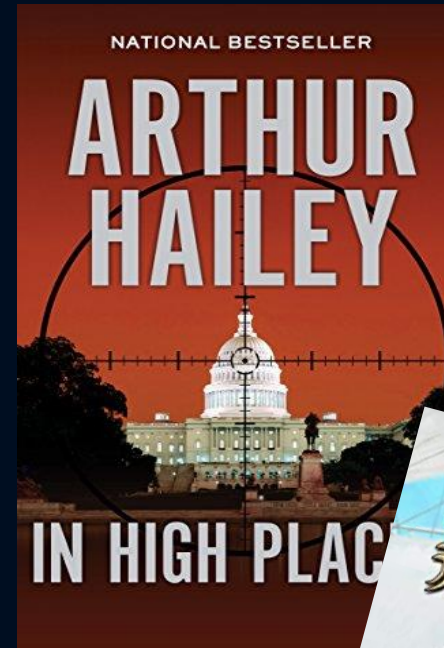




# Visual Assessment

## Exterior Layout: Front Covers

- Artwork clean and hints at content
- Color scheme conforms to genre
- Font easy to read
- Title placement
  - Prominent and in the top third
  - Rulebreakers: famous writers





# Visual Assessment

## Exterior Layout: Back Cover

- Carry through color theme
- Easy to read
- Synopsis
- Endorsement
- ISBN
- Author bio/photo

After solving a series of unexplained deaths in Pittsburgh several years ago, Dr. Bodhi King retreated from the limelight. Now, he's called out of early retirement to help investigate a death cluster on a private island in the Florida Keys. Relatively healthy residents of a nursing home are dying in the middle of the night, expressions of terror etched on their faces.

Reluctant and cautious, the devout Buddhist soon finds himself in the middle of a maelstrom of anger, blame and death. Members of the Golden Island Church have a furtive agenda to protect. The dying Cuban-Americans have long-held secrets of their own.

And everyone seems to have a plan to stop Bodhi from bringing the truth to light.

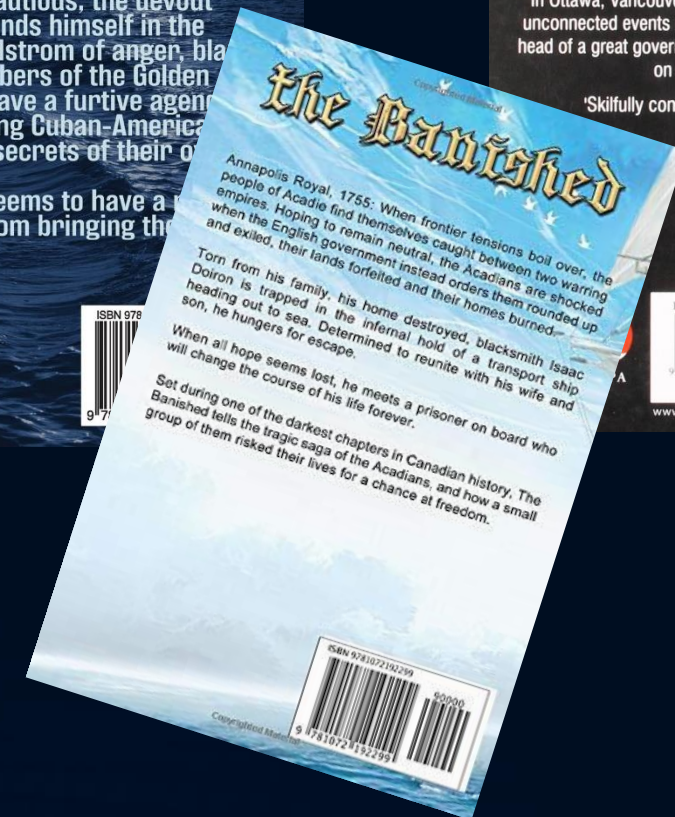
### ARTHUR HAILEY

'One of the most successful novelists of all time.'  
—*New York Times*

*In High Places* focuses as never before on the world of politics, taking us into the very core of any nation's power—its government. In this novel, one of Arthur Hailey's greatest achievements, the passions that seethe behind the blank facades of government offices are exposed, as politicians in power fight to stay there—bartering, back-stabbing, browbeating, bribing with honours, money and women.

In Ottawa, Vancouver and Washington three apparently unconnected events bring startling consequences for the head of a great government—a man whose destiny hangs on a scrap of paper...

'Skillfully constructed, horribly plausible.'  
—*Observer*







# Visual Assessment

## Interior layout

- Easy to read
- Adequate margins
- White space to avoid density
- Indent OR skip a line
- Illustrations/photographs
- Consistent use of design elements (drop caps or scene dividers)

The ladies cleared their trays and bundled up for the walk back to the multipurpose room.  
"I'm glad we don't have to go far to our rooms," Carol commented.  
Aury listened to the ladies chatter on the walk back, content to be absorbing their quilting knowledge any way she could. She was awed by the collective wisdom in their small group.  
The women shed into their places. Some put on their headphones, while others continued to talk about various people they knew.  
"There is no way Debbie was saying, "He thinks he's God's gift to carpentry, but he doesn't have it in him."  
"Let him try," Pat said. "What'll it cost you? He'll be outside enjoying himself, and you can hide in your sewing room. If it doesn't work, I have the number of a handyman."  
"I'll bet you do." Debbie gave an exaggerated wink.  
Pat gave her a soul look and spoke to Aury. "Are you going to get anything done today?"  
"No, I think I'll continue on my useless path of existence," Aury replied, clicking on her sewing machine. Ignoring the snort of laughter from Pat, Aury started lining up the strips she had cut before lunch, organizing the colors into the range she would use to assemble her rose cathedral window. This was supposed to be a project for her and her grandmother together. She wasn't sure she was up for the challenge alone.



The ladies cleared their trays and bundled up for the walk back to the multipurpose room.  
"I'm glad we don't have to go far to our rooms," Carol commented.  
Aury listened to the ladies chatter on the walk back, content to be absorbing their quilting knowledge any way she could. She was awed by the collective wisdom in their small group.  
The women shed their sweaters and jackets and settled back into their places. Some put on their headphones, while others continued to talk about various people they knew.  
"There is no way Fred is going to be able to fix that roof," Debbie was saying. "He thinks he's God's gift to carpentry, but he doesn't have it in him."  
"Let him try," Pat said. "What'll it cost you? He'll be outside enjoying himself, and you can hide in your sewing room. If it doesn't work, I have the number of a handyman."  
"I'll bet you do." Debbie gave an exaggerated wink.





# Visual Assessment

## Interior Layout Front Matter

### Fiction

- Title Page \*
- Copyright \*
- Endorsements
- Epigraph
- Dedication
- Contents
- Prologue

\*required

### Nonfiction

- Title Page \*
- Copyright \*
- Endorsements
- Dedication
- Contents \*
- Foreword
- Preface
- Introduction



# Visual Assessment

## Interior Layout Back Matter

### Fiction

- Acknowledgement
- Notes
- Bibliography
- Author Bio
- Preview Next Book

### Nonfiction

- Acknowledgement
- Appendices
- Bibliography
- Footnotes
- Index
- Author Bio



# Visual Assessment

## E-books

- Cover is the same as the print copy
- Interior layout contains same information as print copy
- Book has reflowable text, adjustable for size, margins, and font
- Illustrations/photographs are clean, clear, captioned, and able to be adjusted
- Links, if included, are pertinent and functional





# Topics for Discussion

- Overview of How We Assess Books
- Content
- Style
- Visual
- Technical



# Technical Assessment

Tech questions measure the writing mechanics of the author (and the effectiveness of the editing):

1. Spelling
2. Punctuation
3. Capitalization/Italics
4. Verb tense/subject-verb agreement
5. Poorly constructed sentences: awkward, run-on, too complex, fragments that don't make sense

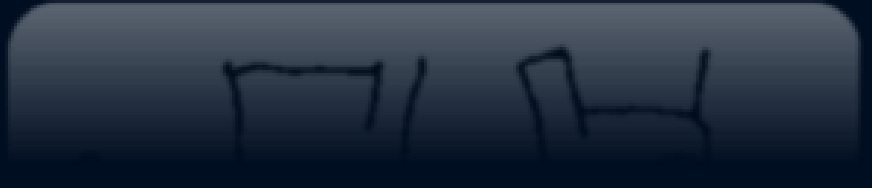




# Technical Assessment

## How it works

- We note and count the errors we see in each of the five categories.
- We allow a certain number of errors (**no one is perfect**) depending on the length of the book.
- Too many errors in tech can “torpedo” the book’s medal worthiness.





# Technical Assessment

## The Torpedo Problem

A low tech score can override the medal designation of the other three scoring areas.

## The Solution

Hire a competent editor.







# Writer's Education Webpage

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## Writers Education Zoom: Get Your Book Right Before the World Judges You: What Agents, Publishers, and Reviewers Are Looking For by Dawn Brotherton (Parts 1-4)

New and unknown authors have discovered that the book publishing industry can be hard to break into. If an author chooses to self-publish, it can be difficult to know where to start with the editing, layout, and design, whether doing it for themselves or hiring someone else to do it. This presentation



Member Resources

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Services For Writers

AgoView Press

Ledger Publishing, Inc.

Sue Rushford Editorial Services

Fletcher & Co. Publishers

Timothy Heck


Bob Worthington

- MEMBERSHIP ACTIONS
- MEMBER RESOURCE DIRECTORY
- DISPATCHES MAGAZINE
- AUTHOR INTERVIEWS
- SOCIAL MEDIA
- REVIEW SWAP
- BETA READERS
- WRITERS EDUCATION
- TIPS & TRICKS
- VETERANS OUTREACH
- NEWSLETTERS
- NOW WHAT
- ZOOMING WITH MWSA
- ONLINE STORE


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### Education



Writers Education Zoom: Short Stories are Fun, by Jim Tritten  
Jan 10, 2022



Writers Education Zoom: Get Your Book Right Before the World Judges You: What Agents, Publishers, and Reviewers Are Looking For by Dawn Brotherton

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