



Guidelines for Evaluating WILLA Entries in the Creative Nonfiction Category

The purpose of Women Writing the West® is to become the internationally recognized organization of writers and other professionals engaged in writing and promoting writing about the North American West with emphasis on the experiences and sensibilities of women in that region. The WILLA Literary Awards are presented annually for outstanding literature featuring women’s or girls’ stories set in the North American West and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

Entries in the Creative Nonfiction category include autobiographical works and other creative nonfiction not geared toward children or young adults. The following rubrics were developed to help readers evaluate such diverse entries. They are intended to be guidelines only. Readers should use their own judgement in assessing how well each entry suits its target audience.

Points should be awarded as follows:

- 10 – exceptional in all regards
- 9 – excellent
- 8 – well done
- 7 – majority well done; room for polish
- 6 – good overall with strong points
- 5 – good overall
- 4 – good overall with some weak points
- 3 – good start but needs work
- 2 – good idea but poor presentation
- 1 – needs work throughout
- 0 – ineligible

Note that entries that do not warrant at least 4 points in the first benchmark, “Women of the West Theme,” should be disqualified.

WILLA CATEGORY RUBRIC CREATIVE NONFICTION[®]

| Creative Nonfiction | Ineligible | 4 – 7 points | 8 – 10 points |
|----------------------------|--|---|---|
| 1. Women of the West Theme | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central focus and theme of the narrative is a male experience • Book not set in or pertains to the West* • Does not portray authentic western experience • Theme & content do not reflect WWW’s mission & goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least half the focus and theme of the narrative is a female experience • Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West* • Generally portrays authentic western experience • Theme & content generally well reflect WWW’s mission & goals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The central focus and theme of the narrative is a female experience • Western setting primary & essential* • Consistently portrays authentic western experience • Theme & content excellent reflections of WWW’s mission & goals |
| | 0 – 3 points | 4 – 7 points | 8 – 10 points |
| 2. Characterization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depictions of people not well developed • Stereotypes evident** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Somewhat complex depictions of people • Generally no gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes presented** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complex depictions of people • No gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes included** |
| 3. Setting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting not important • Setting not described, or described poorly • Setting not described accurately • Illustrations (if used) rarely complement or match text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting of moderate importance • Setting described in conventional terms • Setting usually described accurately • Illustrations (if used) usually complement or match text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of place is inherent in the book • Setting vividly described, using all senses • Setting described accurately • Illustrations (if used) consistently complement or match text |



WILLA Rubric – Creative Nonfiction

| Creative Nonfiction | 0 – 3 points | 4 – 7 points | 8 – 10 |
|---------------------|--|---|--|
| 4. Narrative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Biographical Work) Authorial knowledge of the subject not established • (Autobiographical Work) Straight story telling with no attempt at authorial introspection • Poor presentation of facts, concepts, or idea • Premise or subject predictable, or poorly considered • Beginning slow, confusing: conclusion not satisfying • Solicits no emotional response from the reader • Reveals no universal truths about human nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Biographical Work) Authorial knowledge of the subject generally or partially established • (Autobiographical Work) Author integrates some introspection • Fair presentation of facts, concepts, or ideas • Premise or subject not new, but well done • Slow beginning leads to more action; conclusion somewhat satisfying • Solicits some emotional response from the reader • Reveals some universal truths about human nature | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Biographical Work) Authorial knowledge of the subject fully and credibly established • (Autobiographical Work) Author engages in relevant and meaningful introspection • Excellent presentation of facts, concepts, or ideas • Premise or subject shows originality, freshness • Opening draws reader in; ending is satisfying • Solicits meaningful emotional response from the reader • Reveals universal truths about human nature on several levels |
| 5. Voice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative voice lacking, confusing • Voice bland • Voice insensitive or disrespectful • Tone out of sync with the seriousness/lightness of the topic • Dialog (if used) stilted • Quotations (if used) poorly integrated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative voice dependable • Voice generally engaging • Voice generally sensitive and respectful • Tone generally in harmony with the topic • Some, but not all, dialog (if used) sounds natural and believable • Quotations (if used) generally well-integrated | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative voice highly dependable and believable • Narrative voice engaging, fresh, distinct • Voice exceptionally sensitive and respectful • Tone harmonious with the topic • Dialog (if used) effectively integrated • Quotations (if used) effectively integrated |



WILLA Rubric – Creative Nonfiction

| Creative Nonfiction | 0 – 3 points | 4 – 7 points | 8 – 10 |
|--------------------------|---|--|---|
| 6. Literary Qualities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clumsy language • Imagery confusing, clichéd • Text & illustrations (if used) not well matched • Not enjoyable or thought-provoking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smooth language • Imagery clear • Text & illustrations (if used) generally well matched • A pleasant read and occasionally thought provoking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artful use of language • Imagery vivid, fresh • Text & illustrations (if used) integrated fully • Enjoyable, thought-provoking, timeless significance |
| 7. Technical Conventions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book difficult to follow; poorly organized • Writing too wordy, or includes extraneous material • Poor grasp of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, etc. • Citations (if used) confusing, incomplete; or citations needed*** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book generally readable; moderately well organized • Writing generally tight, with some redundancies or extraneous material • Good grasp of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, etc. • Citations (if used) generally good*** | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book consistently easily readable, flows well; well organized • Writing tight • Clear command of basic conventions of grammar, punctuation, etc. • Citations (if used) clear, effective*** |
| 8. Presentation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unattractive cover art & design • Interior design features lacking • Font & typesetting difficult to read • Illustrations (if used) of poor quality, or irrelevant to text • Illustrations (if used) not well balanced or matched with text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adequate cover art & design • Interior design features adequate • Font & typesetting adequate • Illustrations (if used) of moderate clarity, mostly identified; may not always be germane to the text • Illustrations (if used) provide good balance with text | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art & design • Interior design features reflect book’s tone • Font & typesetting clear & well chosen • Illustrations (if used) appropriate, clear, identified • Illustrations (if used) provide excellent balance with text • Properly bound, i.e., audio books and eBooks |

* WWW defines “the West” as all of North America west of the Mississippi River, and includes Alaska and Hawaii.

** An author’s depiction of a real individual’s biases or stereotypical views, presented in context, may be appropriate.

*** Citations might include endnotes, an author’s note, glossary, suggested bibliography, or other supplemental information.

