



## Guidelines for Evaluating WILLA Entries in the Romance Category

The purpose of Women Writing the West<sup>®</sup> 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 Romance Category should have a central plot focus on the development of a relationship between two people. The plot builds toward an optimistic conclusion without including the use of erotica or erotic themes. Note: Stories that focus mainly of other plot topics, and simply add a bit of romance, are better suited to other categories. 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 ROMANCE<sup>©</sup>

Romance	Ineligible	4 – 7 points	8 – 10 points
1. Women of the West Theme	<input type="checkbox"/> Male main character(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Book not set in the West* <input type="checkbox"/> Does not portray authentic western experience <input type="checkbox"/> Theme & content do not reflect WWW’s mission & goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Female characters prominent <input type="checkbox"/> Book set in the West but could have happened anywhere; or, book partly set in the West* <input type="checkbox"/> Generally portrays authentic experience <input type="checkbox"/> Theme & content generally reflect WWW’s mission & goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Female main character(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Western setting primary & essential* <input type="checkbox"/> Consistently portrays authentic western experience <input type="checkbox"/> Theme & content excellent reflections of WWW’s mission & goals
	<b>0 – 3 points</b>	<b>4 – 7 points</b>	<b>8 – 10 points</b>
2. Characterization	<input type="checkbox"/> Characters not well developed <input type="checkbox"/> Stereotypical character(s)** <input type="checkbox"/> Dialogue not convincing <input type="checkbox"/> Characters indistinct from those in similar books <input type="checkbox"/> Didactic, preachy	<input type="checkbox"/> Most characters complex <input type="checkbox"/> Generally no gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes** <input type="checkbox"/> Dialogue at times sounds unnatural <input type="checkbox"/> Characters similar to others within the genre, but well developed <input type="checkbox"/> Character’s “lesson” generally well presented	<input type="checkbox"/> All characters complex, well developed <input type="checkbox"/> No gender, ethnic, racial, or other stereotypes included** <input type="checkbox"/> Dialogue sounds natural <input type="checkbox"/> Characters distinct, original <input type="checkbox"/> Any “lesson” subtle & organic
3. Setting	<input type="checkbox"/> Setting not important to the book <input type="checkbox"/> Setting not described	<input type="checkbox"/> Setting of moderate importance <input type="checkbox"/> Setting described in conventional terms	<input type="checkbox"/> A strong sense of place is inherent in book <input type="checkbox"/> Setting vividly described, using all senses



Romance	0 – 3 points	4 – 7 points	8 – 10 points
4. Plot	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot not focused on the development of relationship between two people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Does not build toward an optimistic conclusion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Contains erotica or erotic themes</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot confusing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subplots (if used) sporadic, or not well balanced with main plot, or left unresolved</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Book fails to hook readers; ending not satisfying</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Implausible</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot predictable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Central focus of relationship between two people not completely developed, or, is diminished by other plot points</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Emotional through line generally builds toward an optimistic conclusion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot moderately well developed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subplots (if used) not always balanced or well resolved</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Slow beginning leads to more action; or conclusion leaves some questions unanswered; or conclusion is not satisfying</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Some points may strain credibility</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot not new, but shows some freshness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Central focus of plot is the development of a relationship between two people</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Emotional through line builds to an optimistic conclusion</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot well developed</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Subplots (if used) well integrated &amp; resolved</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Opening draws reader in; conclusion satisfying</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Suspension of disbelief consistent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Plot original, fresh</li> </ul>
5. Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Narrative voice lacking, confusing, distances readers from the story</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Point of view confusing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Narrative voice dependable</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Point of view waivers, or occasionally jumps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Narrative voice engaging, fresh, distinct</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Point of view clear, consistent; or POV shifts clear &amp; intentional</li> </ul>
6. Literary Qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor or inappropriate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Imagery confusing or nonexistent</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Premise conventional, simplistic, expected</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Not enjoyable or thought-provoking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Book not suited for intended audience, unappealing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Moderate command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Imagery clear</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Premise not new, but well explored</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Book generally suited to the intended audience, moderately appealing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A pleasant read</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Consistently strong command of language (slang, word choice, figurative language, etc.)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Imagery vivid, fresh</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Premise breaks new ground</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Well suited to intended audience, appealing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Thought-provoking</li> </ul>



Romance	0 – 3 points	4 – 7 points	8 – 10 points
7. Technical Conventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary inappropriate for target audience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Frequent problems with grammar, punctuation, spelling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sloppy, wordy, repetitious writing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Poor balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary appropriate for target audience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Occasional lapses of grammar, punctuation, spelling</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clear writing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adequate balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Word count, sentence structure, vocabulary excellent for target audience</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Clear grasp of grammar, punctuation, spelling; or reader trusts that conventions purposefully set aside</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Tight writing</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Good balance between dialogue &amp; narrative</li> </ul>
8. Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Unattractive cover art &amp; design</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interior design features lacking</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Font &amp; typesetting difficult to read</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations (if used) of poor quality, or irrelevant to text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adequate cover art &amp; design</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interior design features adequate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Font &amp; typesetting adequate</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations (if used) of moderate clarity, or not always germane to the text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Attractive, appropriate, compelling cover art &amp; design</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Interior design features reflect book's tone</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Font &amp; typesetting clear</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Illustrations (if used) appropriate, clear</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Properly bound, i.e., audio books and eBooks</li> </ul>

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

\*\* Depiction of a character’s biases or stereotypical views, presented in context, may be appropriate.

