

## Tips for Written Competition Organisers

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I deal with a lot of entry forms for written competitions. Some are good, some are just adequate, and quite a few are simply not up to scratch. Is this important? Yes, because the entry form and associated conditions are part of a competition's promotional material, and poor design and a lack of thought can discourage entrants. People make judgements based on clarity, layout, and the usefulness of the information provided. A sub-standard entry form is a bad advertisement for a competition. So here are some suggestions for competition organisers.

Allow sufficient space to fill in personal details. It's extremely frustrating to be faced with a cramped form, with limited room for entering information, particularly long email addresses. Double-space the lines. Many of us are getting on a bit, which means that it can be difficult to manage tiny, illegible handwriting. It is counterproductive to jam the entry form onto the same page as the conditions, along with a fancy title and some sort of artwork. Use a full A4 page for the entry form, and put the conditions on a separate page. That way we can keep the conditions for reference and submit the entry form. Pages clogged up with logos and pictures are a waste of space, paper, and printer ink. On several occasions I've had to re-format documents (if I have an email version) just to fit the entry form onto a separate page and create enough space to fill in the necessary details. An alternative, of course, is to allow full on-line submissions (not merely on-line payment), and some competitions are moving in that direction. Note that there is a sample entry form available for download in the Competitions section of the ABPA website [www.abpa.org.au](http://www.abpa.org.au) as part of the comprehensive ABPA Competition Package.

Provide entrants with all the information they need. Some conditions are so cryptic that it's pure guesswork trying to figure out what's going on. Apart from basic information about prizes, the closing date, entry fees, payment details, and any line-limit, entrants need to know about any restrictions based on previous awards (both "no cash prize" and "no first prize" are common) or prior publication. In terms of publication "not previously published for individual profit" is simple and clear, and allows for poems that might have merely appeared in an anthology to be eligible. Vague, general statements that ban any prior publication are useless because poets may not be aware that something has been published, perhaps in a poetry group's local paper or a competition booklet that they've never seen. Or even posted on a website by somebody else. It happens! It's also a good idea to specify the type of font (to avoid obscure ones), line spacing (single-space should be fine for poetry and it saves paper), and whether or not hand-written entries will be accepted. And quote the ABPA definition of bush poetry for those who may be new to the genre.

Specify the timeline. That is, state when and how winners will be notified, and when and where the results will be publicly announced. Six weeks should be sufficient time between the closing date and the announcement of results, and anything longer than eight weeks is too much. Please send results and judges' reports to the ABPA webmaster [web@abpa.org.au](mailto:web@abpa.org.au) as soon after the competition as possible. It only takes a few minutes. Don't leave entrants in limbo, wondering what's going on and whether they're free to send their entries elsewhere. If there's an anthology involved, don't keep people hanging around for months wondering if their poem has been included.

And finally, think beyond your own competition. Consider what effect your rules and timeline might have on other competitions, in particular whether you're hindering or helping entrants who might be waiting to submit entries elsewhere. Organising a competition is a big job, mostly done on a voluntary basis, and the effort involved is greatly appreciated by all poets. If it is done efficiently and well the outcome should be an increase in entries and the successful promotion of bush poetry in general.