

WritingWithAI Competition: Understanding the Scoring Rubric

We're thrilled you're participating in our WritingWithAI competition! To help you craft the strongest possible submission, we want to provide a clearer understanding of how your work will be evaluated. While judging inherently involves some subjectivity, our intellectually diverse panel of professional writers, academics, industry experts, and subreddit moderators will use the following rubric, **directly inspired by Michael Kardos's "The Art and Craft of Fiction,"** to ensure a fair and consistent assessment of each entry.

Our Goal

Our aim is to recognize AI-assisted writing that demonstrates exceptional human creativity, skill, and storytelling. We're looking for pieces where AI serves as a powerful tool to **enhance** the author's vision, not replace it. We prioritize **clarity, active characterization, meaningful conflict, and deliberate structural choices**—elements that contribute to truly urgent and compelling narratives. As Kardos suggests, we want characters that "befuddle you, madden you with their inconsistencies, and take your breath away—the way real people do."

Holistic Scoring Note: It's important to understand that each category's score will be taken holistically into account. We recognize that not every story requires the same level of complexity or sophistication in every element. For instance, a short, character-driven piece might not require an intricate plot or a highly unusual setting. Conversely, a plot-heavy genre piece might prioritize structural clarity over deep character interiority. **Judges will assess how effectively each element serves the story's overall purpose and genre, and how well it's executed given the story's specific needs.** A high score means the element is handled expertly *for that particular narrative*, even if it's a subtle or understated approach.

The Scoring Rubric Explained (1-10 points per category)

Here's what our judges will be looking for in each scoring category, guided by Kardos's emphasis on craft:

- **Originality (1-10 points)**
 - **What we're looking for:** This score reflects the uniqueness of your concept, plot, characters, and overall approach. Does your story offer a fresh perspective, a surprising twist, or an inventive premise? Is the execution of a familiar idea particularly novel? We're interested in how you've leveraged AI to explore new narrative territories or enhance a truly unique voice, moving beyond clichés to present something distinct and compellingly believable, even if "weird." A high score here demonstrates the ability to make the improbable feel real, drawing readers into a unique world and **making familiar material fresh.**
 - **High Score (8-10):** The submission presents truly innovative ideas, a fresh take on a genre, or unexpected narrative choices that genuinely captivate the reader, presenting a

believable reality, no matter how unusual. The approach to the material feels unique and fresh.

- **Mid Score (5-7):** The submission has some interesting elements but might lean on more common tropes or ideas without significant innovation.
- **Low Score (1-4):** The submission feels derivative, predictable, or lacks a distinct voice or concept.

- **Clarity and Structure (1-10 points)**

- **What we're looking for:** This category assesses how well your story is organized and easy to follow. Is the **pacing effective**? Do events flow logically, with strong **causal connections** between them? Are transitions smooth? For novel excerpts, does it **draw the reader in** quickly and make them want to read more? For scripts, is the formatting correct and the scene progression clear? We'll evaluate how well you **establish the story's stakes** early on, giving readers a reason to keep reading. This includes how effectively you choose your starting point (e.g., *in medias res* or a "break from routine") to **spark curiosity** and provide necessary information without sacrificing momentum, and how the **break from everyday routine** drives the narrative.
- We will also look at the masterful construction of **scenes**, including compelling **dialogue** (where "something is at stake," not just idle chatter), and the effective integration of **narration, description, and interiority**. We value the judicious use of **scene versus summary** to control pacing and focus. A high score here demonstrates a strong understanding of plot mechanics, including the development of **external and internal conflict, complications building to a crisis, and a clear sense of climax**. The **ending** should feel earned and impactful, speaking to the protagonist's immediate and broader predicaments, or offering a meaningful glimpse of the future. Throughout, the writing should demonstrate **clarity**, ensuring the reader always understands character relationships, actions, locations, and time periods.
- **High Score (8-10):** The narrative is exceptionally well-organized, with a clear beginning, middle, and (implied) end, driven by believable causal connections. Pacing is masterful, every element serves a purpose in advancing the story, and the chosen opening effectively hooks the reader and clarifies the stakes. Scenes are built with precision, using dialogue, narration, description, and interiority to maximum effect. The ending is powerful and resonant. The story maintains exceptional clarity even with multiple characters, locations, or time periods.
- **Mid Score (5-7):** The structure is generally sound, but there might be minor pacing issues, occasional confusing transitions, or moments where the narrative meanders. The stakes might not be immediately clear, or the opening could be more compelling. Scene construction might be uneven, or causal connections could be stronger. The ending may be satisfactory but not deeply impactful. Some moments of confusion regarding relationships, location, or time may occur.
- **Low Score (1-4):** The story feels disjointed, difficult to follow, or lacks a clear narrative arc. Pacing may be inconsistent, making it a struggle to engage, and the stakes are

ill-defined or absent. Scenes are poorly constructed, or the plot lacks logical progression. The ending falls flat. The writing lacks clarity, making it hard to follow events or character motivations.

- **Characterization (1-10 points)**

- **What we're looking for:** This category focuses on the depth, believability, and consistency of your characters. Are they complex, inconsistent (in a realistic way), and compelling, like real people? We'll assess how you use the various methods of characterization: through **physical description, objects they carry, habits, dialogue (what they habitually say), internal thoughts, past memories, and the reactions of other characters**. Strong characters are revealed not just by who they are, but by what they *do*—their **active choices** and how their desires (dreads, fears, expectations, hopes, and dreams) drive their actions. We'll look for how the story tests your character, putting them in **predicaments that thwart expectations, dash hopes, or stir fears**, and how they change (or resist change) throughout the story, both externally and internally.
- **High Score (8-10):** Characters feel fully realized, multi-dimensional, and memorable. Their active choices, driven by clear desires and faced with significant threats, consistently reveal their personality, motivations, and internal life, making them feel genuinely human. They drive the plot and demonstrate believable internal and external changes.
- **Mid Score (5-7):** Characters are generally understandable but might lack significant depth or nuance. Some characterization methods may be used, but not consistently or effectively across the narrative. Their active role in advancing the plot or their capacity for change could be more pronounced.
- **Low Score (1-4):** Characters feel flat, stereotypical, or inconsistent. Their motivations are unclear, they don't engage the reader emotionally or intellectually, and they contribute little to the plot's progression or thematic development. They appear passive or their actions lack believable motivation.

- **Setting (1-10 points)**

- **What we're looking for:** This score evaluates how effectively you utilize your story's setting. Is the setting vivid and immersive? Does it contribute meaningfully to the story, influencing plot, mood, and character? We'll look for how details of **place, time, meteorological conditions, and environment (e.g., lighting, temperature)** enhance the narrative. A strong setting isn't just a backdrop; it's an active element that shapes the story and its inhabitants, often revealed through **sensory details** that place the reader within the scene. We value **unusual or unexpected settings** that add freshness and intrigue, and how even common places are made distinct and impactful.
- **High Score (8-10):** The setting is a powerful and integrated element of the story, vividly rendered with rich sensory details that enhance mood, plot, and character. It feels

essential and contributes to the story's overall impact, often adding a unique dimension to the narrative.

- **Mid Score (5-7):** The setting is described adequately but might not play a significant role in the story. Details might be present but don't always feel crucial or consistently immersive, or the setting itself feels generic.
- **Low Score (1-4):** The setting feels generic, undeveloped, or interchangeable. It doesn't contribute meaningfully to the narrative, and the reader has little sense of place.

- **Point of View (POV) and Voice (1-10 points)**

- **What we're looking for:** This category assesses your deliberate choices regarding POV and the distinctness of your narrative voice. Is the **POV consistent and effectively chosen** to serve the story (first, second, or third person)? If third-person, is the **narrative distance** effectively managed (close vs. distant) to control reader empathy and information flow? Is the **narrator's reliability** considered? For voice, we'll look at **diction, syntax, and tone**. Does your voice feel unique, authentic, and appropriate for the story and its characters? A strong voice isn't just about what's said, but *how* it's said, actively shaping the reader's experience and contributing to characterization and the overall clarity of the narrative.
- **High Score (8-10):** The POV is impeccably chosen and maintained, effectively revealing information and shaping the reader's experience. The narrative voice is distinct, compelling, and consistent, adding significant depth and personality to the story through its unique diction, syntax, and tone.
- **Mid Score (5-7):** The POV is generally clear but might occasionally waver or not be the most effective choice. The voice is present but might lack distinctiveness or consistency, or occasionally feel generic.
- **Low Score (1-4):** The POV is confusing or inconsistent, hindering the reader's understanding. The narrative voice is weak, generic, or inappropriate for the story, making it difficult to connect with the narrative.

- **Theme / Depth (1-10 points)**

- **What we're looking for:** This evaluates the underlying ideas and beliefs that your story embodies. Does your story explore meaningful ideas, emotions, or philosophical questions? Does it offer insights into the human condition or the world around us? This category considers the richness and resonance of your story beyond its surface plot. We're looking for **themes that emerge organically from the narrative and its meticulously chosen details, character interactions, and the story's overall form**, allowing the reader to infer meaning rather than being explicitly stated. A strong theme adds layers of meaning and lasting resonance, revealing what the story is "about at its deepest level" and demonstrating an author's attention to how a story's many details contribute to its themes.
- **High Score (8-10):** The submission explores complex themes with nuance and sophistication, prompting reflection and offering a deeper understanding of its subject

matter, often revealed through the accumulation of precise, relevant details and the actions/choices of well-developed characters. The story's form itself may even underscore its thematic concerns.

- **Mid Score (5-7):** The story touches on interesting themes, but they might not be fully developed or explored with significant depth, or they may be stated rather than organically revealed.
- **Low Score (1-4):** The submission lacks a clear thematic core, feels superficial, or relies on simplistic ideas, failing to offer deeper meaning.

AI-Assisted, Not AI-Generated

Remember, this is an **AI-assisted** competition. Your short paragraph explaining how AI was used and any prompts will provide context to the judges. We are looking for the human hand guiding the story, with AI acting as a supportive tool for ideation, editing, or overcoming creative blocks. **Submissions determined to be fully AI-generated will be disqualified.**

Genre Guidelines

We accept all fiction genres, including:

- Speculative (sci-fi, fantasy, alternate history)
- Literary / Slice of Life
- Mystery / Thriller
- Experimental (fragments, vignettes, hybrid forms)

You're free to submit work in any style—but be aware: all entries will be judged within a shared rubric across genres. There are no separate genre categories. That means your introspective character study may be judged alongside a space opera, or your nonlinear fragment next to a mystery-thriller.

This pluralistic landscape rewards originality and execution over genre convention. If your work pushes formal or thematic boundaries, make sure it still holds up under craft-based scrutiny—structure, clarity, impact. Judges will not favor or penalize genre; they'll score based on quality.

(You may also be asked to tag your genre at submission to help with initial sorting and reader expectations.)

Request for Feedback from Mod Team

@ModTeam: We would like to include this detailed rubric explanation with the official competition announcement.

Please review it and provide any feedback you have. We believe this will greatly assist competitors and ensure a more transparent and consistent judging process.