

North Street Book Prize: Judging Process

The North Street Book Prize receives between 1,700-2,100 submissions each year. Physical books sent in the mail are read by assistant judge Sarah Halper. Digital submissions are read by assistant judges Annie Mydla, Ewa Stachyra, Pawel Zagawa, Mateusz Naporowski, Jakub Karolczyk, and Joanna Lewandowska. The assistant judges identify 40-60 semi-finalists to be read by head judge and Winning Writers editor Jendi Reiter, sometimes with help from judge Lauren Singer. Jendi then makes the final decisions in each category.

Priorities at each round of judging

If a book is eliminated in the first round, it is often because we were looking for these characteristics: a narrower scope to the book overall; a topic or topics we see less often; a novel, specific approach to the topic(s); more intentionality and distinctness in the plot emphasis; more tension in the rising action; a more pronounced climax; more specific characters; a more pronounced internal arc of change in a character; a wider or more proficient use of literary devices to tell the story (more than simple narration); and/or a more developed prose style. Some of the priorities of first round judging are described in the ["Annie in the Middle" blog](#). About 80% of entries are eliminated in the first round of judging.

Books that make it to the second round are superior in at least one of the areas above.

If a book is eliminated in the second round, it is often because we sought a higher level of craft in the areas above; because other competitors showed better craft; or because other competitors had topics, themes, and characters closer to those described in the article by Jendi Reiter and Annie Mydla, ["Advice from the Judges of the North Street Book Prize"](#). About 75% of the remaining books are eliminated in the second round of judging.

Books that make it to the third round are superior in several of the areas described above. They have topics, themes, and characters that appeal to the North Street judges and Winning Writers as an organization. We strive to make Winning Writers' judging interests transparent. You can learn about them from the comments on our winners and honorable mentions, available in our [contest archives](#).

If a book is eliminated in the third round, it is most often due to the competition being a little stronger. About half of the books that make it to the third round are eliminated before the fourth round.

The fourth round of judging, Semi-Finals, is conducted by head judge Jendi Reiter. Jendi is looking for the best entries in terms of craft; for stories, characters, and themes attractive to Winning Writers' interests and values, as well as those of our subscribers; and for intangibles like whether or not the book feels right for us.

Following the fourth round of judging, some entries do not advance and remain Semi-Finalists. Jendi ranks the very top entries as Finalists, Honorable Mentions, First Prize Winners, and the Grand Prize Winner. Only about 1% of all entries win a cash prize.

As with all our contests, there is a subjective element to judging. We have awarded prizes to people who have never won anything before, and passed on work that went on to win prizes elsewhere. We welcome the diversity of opinions.