Judging Guidelines
For the Editors' Choice Award

The Editors' Choice Award was developed to honor and promote books that even a professional editor would love! But professional editors are picky. So it's not an easy award to win.

Copyeditors can't read a book without noticing typos, inconsistencies, and errors in "PUGS" (punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling). Developmental and substantive editors can't read a book without noticing leaps of logic, slow pacing, insufficient characterization, and plots that meander along like a crooked stream without ever getting anywhere. We use both kinds of editors to judge the books entered for the Editors' Choice Award.

REQUIREMENTS
All ECA judges must be established, professional developmental/substantive editors or copyeditors with at least two years of paid experience (either members of Christian Editor Connection or qualified to be members).

Judges must agree with the Christian Editors Association's [Statement of Faith](#).

Judges may not judge any book they were involved in, whether as a paid editor or an unpaid beta reader.

Judges provide feedback for each book they review on a Score Sheet, including specific examples of any areas of difficulty. They list typos, inconsistencies, and errors in punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling on a PUGS List.

Our judges use the most recent editions of the book publishing industry's standard guidelines for PUGS, formatting, and citations:

- *The Chicago Manual of Style*
- *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style*
- *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*

JUDGING

The Editors' Choice Award consists of three rounds of judging.

Round One is conducted by copyeditors.
The copyeditor's first step is to judge the book's front and back covers. A cover sets the stage for the rest of the book—it's what potential readers see first. A well-designed cover makes the reader curious about what's inside. There can be no errors on the front cover.

A few minor errors on the back cover may be tolerated, but they will be added to the Score Sheet or PUGS List, so a book will lose points before it's even read.

A cover with more than a few minor errors will immediately eliminate the book from further judging.

If a book passes review of the covers, the judge will read the book's content, marking down each typo, inconsistency, and error in punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling they find on their PUGS List.

The PUGS List will look something like this:

Page #	Line # or 1st words	Error	If this could be a publisher's style rule, is it applied consistently?
Back cover	I was so sure	Comma before "too" at the end of the sentence	Yes
7	I wasn't sure	Space after ellipsis before quotation mark	
9	I have learned	Second "to" not needed in this line	
10	Being married	"which" instead of "that"	

Mistakes and concerns not related to typos, inconsistencies, or errors in punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling will be marked on the judge's Score Sheet.

Judges will mark errors or inconsistencies with the book's formatting on the Score Sheet. Formatting errors may include:

- Some paragraphs having full justification and others having ragged right margins
- Bulleted or numbered lists inconsistently indented
- Wrong or missing page numbers or headers
- Inconsistent spacing above or below chapter titles
- Incorrect end-of-line hyphenation

Since we offer to send judges' feedback to authors and editors of submitted books, judges must type or write legibly on their Score Sheets and PUGS Lists.

While we want our judges to be thorough, it is not their job to edit these books, only to review them. If a judge finds too many errors in the first few pages, the judge will stop, disqualify the book, and move on.

How many mistakes is too many? More than one per page, definitely. If a judge finds an error on every one of the first twenty pages, the book will not go any further.

Just because our judges are looking for typos, inconsistencies, and PUGS errors, that doesn't mean they don't also read the books for content. Even if a book has perfect punctuation, usage, grammar, and spelling, and zero typos or inconsistencies, if it's the best antidote to insomnia since the invention of Demerol, the judge may recommend against moving the book to Round Two.

If the book passes the major content review, the judges turn their attention to the front and back matter.

Front matter may include:

- Title page
- Copyright page
- Dedication
- Epigraph
- Acknowledgments (Make sure it is not spelled "Acknowledg**e**ments")
- Endorsements
- Table of Contents
- Foreword (Make sure it is not spelled "Forward")
- Preface

Back matter may include:

- An appendix or appendices
- Endnotes
- Abbreviations
- Glossary
- Bibliography/References
- Index

A few minor errors in the front or back matter may be tolerated, but they will be added to the Score Sheet or PUGS List. Even if a book has a great message, it should be eliminated before the second round if it contains too many errors.

If a book makes it past the first round, it moves to Round Two.

Round Two is conducted by developmental/substantive editors.

In Round Two, the judge reviews the quality of the writing and content.

For a fiction book, judges will consider the following:

- Beginning. The book needs an attention-grabbing first chapter that flows well, holds readers' interest, and makes them want to turn the page at the end of the chapter. The POV character in the first chapter should be the main character for the book.
- Middle. The plot and subplots need to be engaging enough to sustain the reader's interest through the length of the book.
- Ending. At the end of the story, all major plot points should be resolved after the subplots have been wrapped up. A "happily ever after" is not necessary, but the reader should feel satisfied that things happened as they should have.
- Plot. If there are plot holes big enough to float a battleship, or leaps in logic that go beyond "willing suspension of disbelief," the book should not continue to the next round.
- Characters. Cardboard cutout characters are no fun. The book's major characters—even the villains—should be three-dimensional characters with their own goals, desires, and motivations. There should not be too many characters for a reader to keep track of. POV characters should appear early on and consistently throughout the story. Character descriptions should be intriguing, with only enough detail to pique the reader's interest. Readers don't need to know every main and secondary character's hair and eye color or what they're wearing—only what's important to the story and what would be noticed by the POV character in the moment.
- Dialogue. Everything the characters say should be relevant to the plot and move the story forward. Individual characters should be recognizable by the way they speak. (The PhD from Alabama shouldn't talk like the high school dropout, who shouldn't talk like the German immigrant.) A character's actions and dialogue should be in the same paragraph. Two characters' lines of dialogue should never be in the same paragraph (unless they say the same thing simultaneously).
- Dialogue tags and action beats. While *said* may be considered "invisible," it should not be overused. Obscure synonyms for *said* and adverbs with *said* should be avoided. Action beats are typically preferred over attributions, but only if they make sense.
- Setting. The time and place should be appropriate to the story, with just enough description to make it easily imagined—not long paragraphs full of descriptive details. If the book is historical fiction or a speculative novel (fantasy or science fiction), the judge will pay special attention to worldbuilding.
- Point of View. POV should be consistent and clear, with one POV character per scene. A switch to another character's POV within a chapter should be clearly identified with one or three asterisks, pound signs, or some other symbol. Everything in a POV character's scene must be observable or experienced by that character.

- Movements. Characters should not sit if they're already sitting, stand if they're already standing, see things when their eyes are closed, observe things while they're asleep or unconscious, etc.
- Action. Something interesting should be happening in every scene. No long sections of just dialogue with nothing interesting going on. Characters should not do the same thing over and over, such as drinking coffee, smiling, laughing, frowning, crying/sobbing/weeping/shedding tears.
- Backstory/flashbacks. Background information should be sprinkled here and there as needed, woven into scenes as it becomes relevant, after the reader has had a chance to get to know and care about the main characters in their present lives. If flashbacks do occur, they must begin and end clearly and naturally, with something in the main story triggering them.
- Research. Each character should act and speak (and, if a POV character, think) in keeping with his or her background, experience, education, profession, hobbies, area(s) where he or she lives (or lived), etc. If the novel is historical, the time period must be accurately portrayed. (For example, cars during World War I did not have automatic transmissions and purr along well-maintained roads at a hundred miles per hour. DNA tests to absolve people of crimes didn't enter the legal system until 1987.)

For a nonfiction book, judges will consider the following:

- Opening. Does the Introduction or first chapter clearly identify what the book is about, who the author is, why the author wrote the book, and what readers can get out of reading it?
- Content. Is the book interesting enough that readers will want to keep reading when they reach the end of each chapter? Does every chapter offer some kind of takeaway and hope/encouragement for the reader?
- Organization. The book should be laid out logically so that it makes sense. (If the book is a devotional based around caring for sick puppies in Iowa, it probably shouldn't include sidebars on the differences between the brightly colored poison dart frogs of the South American rain forest—unless perhaps a South African missionary inadvertently brought the poison home to her pets in Iowa.)
- Audience. A book intended for middle-grade children shouldn't contain words like *anthropomorphism* or phrases such as *existential crisis*.
- Message. The writing may be beautiful, but if the judge finishes the book with no clue what it was about, it shouldn't make it to the next round.
- Research. Facts must be accurate. If the book includes statistics, they must be easy to read and understand, include all pertinent details, and have references to reputable sources. (For example, an author should not write something like "Fifty percent of all marriages end in divorce." According to whom? And what does that mean? That half of all the marriages that have ever taken place from the beginning of time until yesterday have already ended in divorce?) Citations must be included for all quotes from sources other than the author, following *The Chicago Manual of Style* guidelines.

- Legal issues. Song titles may be used, but even short excerpts of lyrics cannot. Use of Scripture quotations beyond what the publisher of the version being quoted allows requires written permission from the publisher. Authors who write true stories about real people must be extremely cautious about portraying them in a negative light. Simply changing names and a few details is not enough. If a real person might recognize him/herself in the book and sue the author, and that individual has not signed a permission statement, we do not want to give that book an award.

If there are serious content errors or concerns, the judge should note them on the Score Sheet, disqualify the book, and move on.

If a book makes it past the second round, it moves to Round Three.

Round Three is conducted by editing experts.
In Round Three, the final judges review the previous judges' Score Sheets and PUGS Lists. They also review the book for themselves, noting any additional typos, inconsistencies, or PUGS errors, or writing quality or content issues, that the earlier judges may have missed.

The Round Three judges determine which books qualify as finalists and which deserve to be chosen as winners of the Editors' Choice Award.