

Frequently Asked Questions for Judges

Q: Who is eligible to judge the Diamond Heart Awards and Golden Heart Awards?

A: Eligibility varies by round:

- First Round: RWA General and Associate-Writer Members, non-RWA member published romance authors, book reviewers, booksellers, librarians, and professional critics who meet certain criteria.
- Second Round: RWA General Members, non-RWA member published romance authors, book reviewers, booksellers, librarians, and professional critics who meet certain criteria.
- Third Round: Book reviewers, booksellers, librarians, professional critics, freelance editors, book coaches, creative writing educators who teach genre romance, and highly qualified judges from rounds one and two.

Q: What are the requirements to be a judge?

A: Judges must demonstrate an understanding of romantic fiction, complete diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility (DEIA), sensitivity, and contest training, agree to follow the judging rubrics, and go through an application and acceptance process. Judging is voluntary and independent of contest entry.

Q: How many entries will a judge receive per round?

A: Judges can self-select to judge between one to five entries in any given round. Judges will receive no more than five entries per round.

Q: How are judges matched with entries?

A: Judges indicate their category, subgenre, sensuality level preferences, and qualifications. Entries are sorted and assigned to qualified judges based on the entrants' subgenre and sensuality level designations using a computer program. If a judge is also an entrant in the contest, they cannot judge entries in the same category.

Q: What are judges required to do?

A: Judges must read each assigned entry in its entirety, provide scores based on the appropriate round's rubric, and submit scores by the specified deadline. Judges should be mindful of the contest's core purpose of recognizing excellence and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Q: What is the policy on judge-entrant communication?

A: Communication between judges and entrants is expressly forbidden. Judges should not discuss or post about the entries they are judging to protect contest integrity. Judges should not contact entrants under any circumstances.

Q: Who should judges contact with questions?

A: All judge questions and concerns should be directed to contests@rwa.org.

Q: What happens if a judge's scores seem biased or non-compliant with the rubrics?

A: RWA tracks and analyzes judge scores. If there are concerns a judge's scoring is biased or violates the rubric or RWA's anti-discrimination policy, the judge may be asked for an explanation and potentially removed from the current and future judging pools if their response is unsatisfactory. Judges can appeal removal decisions to the Contest Committee and Executive Director.

Q: What is the judging schedule?

A: The judging schedule is as follows:

Wednesday, April 17, 2024

Judge sign-up begins.

Friday, May 10, 2024

Judge sign-ups close.

Friday, May 17, 2024

Last day for judges to complete training and testing.

Friday, June 28, 2024

Onboarding will be available to judges on the training website.

Friday, July 19, 2024

The first round of judging will open. Entries and score sheets will be available to the judges on the contest website.

Monday, August 26, 2024

Round One score sheets are due.

Friday, September 13, 2024

The second round of judging will open. Entries and score sheets will be available to the judges on the contest website.

Monday, October 21, 2024

Round Two score sheets are due.

Friday, November 8, 2024

The Third round of judging will open. Entries and score sheets will be available to the judges on the contest website.

Monday December 16, 2024

Round three score sheets are due.

Q: How do I sign up to be a judge?

A: Go to rwacontest.org and register. Follow the prompts to create a profile. Once you have verified your email address, you can login and complete the judge sign up form.