



Central Ohio Fiction Writers'  
**Karen Harper Memorial Ignite the Flame  
Contest**  
Judging Guidelines



The Ignite the Flame Contest provides an opportunity for romance writers to receive high-quality, constructive feedback from other romance writers so they can improve their work. As you read, consider what works or doesn't work in each piece and why.

**IDEALS:**

- **Igniting the Flame:** The selection focuses on the scene where the protagonists first realize a romantic attraction for each other.
- **Characterization:** The selection introduces characters who are believable, irresistible, or captivating.
- **Plot:** The selection introduces a believable story arc that includes an attraction strong enough to bring the protagonists together despite the odds against them.
- **Marketability:** The selection creates a hook that draws readers into the story, expresses a theme that resonates with readers, and makes continued reading essential.
- **Mechanics:** The selection is well-written, demonstrating a solid grasp of spelling, usage, grammar, and paragraph structure.

As you evaluate each entry, consider the feedback you wish to provide the writer. Focus on the basic requirement of the contest – the scene where the protagonists meet or reunite, “igniting the flame” – and the overall quality of the writing. **Remember**, this is part of a completed manuscript. The winning entry will be published.

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## Judges' Instructions:

1. Attend the Judges Training, as we focus on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) in our judging. This session will be the Program August 13, 2022, starting approximately 1:30 pm and ending sometime before 3:30 PM. It will be recorded so that judges who cannot attend can watch it, and affirm to the ITF Chair that they have watched the training, and will uphold COFW's belief in the importance of DEIA.
2. Complete the two scoring sheets below: the Rubric and the Contestant Feedback. Judging begins Sept. 1. By 11:59 PM EST on Sept. 15, return the required scoring information to the ITF Contest Chair.
3. Please score each entry on a scale between 1 and 5. You may use fractional numbers in scoring: .25, .5, .75 (See the Rubric below.)

When scoring, keep this scale in mind:

- **5 indicates excellence**, a publishable work with minor flaws easily corrected with editing
- **4 indicates very good work** that requires minor revision to make the manuscript sparkle.
- **3 is average**, work that is good but needs polish or lacks any quality that makes it stand out.
- **2 indicates below average quality**, a piece that requires serious revision.
- **1 indicates writing that reflects a lack** of mastery of the basics of story construction and good writing

COFW promises feedback to all entrants.

4. Please complete the feedback form with at least two statements in each heading. Additional comments are optional but encouraged if you see fit.
5. After you have scored your entries, email your score sheets and feedback forms, along with each entry you are judging, to [ITF-Contest@cofwevents.org](mailto:ITF-Contest@cofwevents.org).
6. Keep a copy of each scoresheet and entry until the winner is announced.

## Points to consider as you judge each area:

### **5 indicates excellence**

- Meets the requirement of the contest for the Meet/Cute scene where the protagonists first realize their romantic attraction for each other
- Depicts two characters who are believable, irresistible, and captivating
- Clearly presents the moment when the protagonists from separate aspects of their world recognize a spark of attraction strong enough to eventually, despite all odds, take them to a happily-ever-after
- Captures the reader's heart, draws the reader into the story, and reflects one of many possible romantic tropes or themes
- Is publishable with minor flaws in mechanics, usage, grammar, and/or paragraph structure

### **4 indicates good work**

- Meets requirement of the contest for the Meet/Cute scene where the protagonists first realize their romantic attraction for each other
- Depicts characters who are interesting, believable, and worth rooting for
- Presents the moment when two characters from seemingly different aspects of their world recognize an attraction for each other
- Draws readers into the story and reflects at least one of many possible romance tropes or themes
- Is publishable but not without corrections in mechanics, usage, grammar, and/or paragraph structure

### **3 indicates average work**

- Offers the scene where the protagonists meet but the selection isn't clear as to whether they realize their romantic attraction for the first time
- Depicts protagonists who may be interesting but lack believability
- Does not clearly represent two protagonists from different aspects of their world and who may show a liking for each other but not strongly enough to overcome the odds and reach a happily-ever-after
- Lacks enough attraction to the characters and the scene to keep the reader's interest, and a romance theme or trope is difficult to define
- Needs a fair amount of rewriting and polish to be publishable

### **2 indicates work requiring serious revision**

- Veers from focusing on the protagonists and their romantic attraction for each other for the first time
- Fails to depict protagonists who are interesting enough to capture the reader's attention
- May show two protagonists but the two do not come from two distinct aspects of their world and the spark of attraction isn't strong enough to be believable
- Lacks clear direction to keep the reader interested and lacks any romance trope or theme
- Shows serious deficiencies in spelling, usage, mechanics, and grammar and the need for significant editing

### **1 indicates poor work**

- Offers a scene(s) that do not show the protagonists recognizing their romantic attraction for the first time
- Characters are not clearly defined as protagonists, lack interest, and are not worth rooting for
- Characters are not clearly defined protagonists from separate aspects of their world and fail to show enough attraction to each other to carry them to a happily-ever-after
- Rambles, preaches, shows little to no direction relevant to a romance story and the characters are more akin to stereotypes than relatable people
- Contains poor writing, spelling, usage, mechanics, and grammar and requires major rewriting

## RUBRIC for Judging Ignite the Flame 2022

Title of Entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Author #: \_\_\_\_\_ Judge's ID: \_\_\_\_\_

**Score the entry from 1 to 5 in each of the following categories. You may use fractional numbers in scoring: .25, .5, .75**

**1. Igniting the Flame: \_\_\_\_\_**

Consider:

- The selection focuses on the scene where the protagonists first realize a romantic attraction for each other
- The believability and degree of excitement you have for the relationship between the main character and the love interest.
- Emotional and physical possibilities create a spark of awareness between them, either positive or negative.

**2. Characterization: \_\_\_\_\_**

Consider:

- The selection introduces characters who are believable, irresistible, or captivating.
- The main character is three-dimensional, with believable traits and flaws.
- The love interest is three-dimensional, with believable traits and flaws.
- The dialogue moves the story forward. It sounds natural and realistic. The author balances dialogue with narrative.

**3. Plot: \_\_\_\_\_**

Consider:

- The selection introduces a believable story arc that includes an attraction strong enough to bring the protagonists together despite the odds against them.
- The two main characters have clear cut goals that feel capable of sustain a novel.
- The two main characters have believable motivations for their actions; their actions are logical for the situation.
- You can determine what's at stake within this scene for each of the two main characters.
- The narrative moves the story forward versus being bogged down with backstory or unnecessary descriptions.

**4. Marketability: \_\_\_\_\_**

Consider

- The selection creates a hook that draws readers into the story, expresses a theme that resonates with readers, and makes continued reading essential. It totally ignited the flame.
- The author uses a fresh, unique voice with a consistent tone throughout the entry.
- The piece feels like it fits in the category the author has selected.
- Pacing flows well throughout the entry and pushes the story forward, holding your interest.
- Sense of time and place are established. Setting is easy to picture. Multiple senses are used to create a vivid picture.

**5. Mechanics: \_\_\_\_\_**

Consider:

- How well-written the selection is, demonstrating a solid grasp of American English spelling, usage, grammar, and paragraph structure, given that the novel of the winning piece will be published by a US publisher.
- How well dialogue tagging worked.
- Actions and emotions are shown rather than told. They pull you into the scene.
- The entry was formatted as the guidelines required.

Total Score (5-25): \_\_\_\_\_

## Feedback for Entrant

Title of Entry: \_\_\_\_\_

Author #: \_\_\_\_\_ Judge's ID: \_\_\_\_\_

Total Score (5-25) : \_\_\_\_\_

Positive Elements:

Elements to improve:

Judge's Comments (optional):