



35th Annual Minnesota Book Awards
- Primer for Preliminary Round Facilitators -

Saturday, January 28, 2023 | 10:00 a.m. official start time
[via Zoom \(click here at 10:00\)](#)

Thank you for agreeing to serve as a session facilitator on the January 28 (preliminary round) judging day. In order to feel prepared and comfortable, please review the below. We ask that you do so even if you have facilitated in the past, as some expectations may be slightly different from years past.

Table of Contents

1. [Facilitator Responsibilities](#)
2. [Common Problem Scenarios + Resolution Strategies](#)
3. [Talking Points \(aka “Script”\)](#)

Facilitator Responsibilities

- Overview: Your primary role as a facilitator is to make sure your panel’s discussion stays focused on the three weighted judging criteria outlined on Page 4 of the judging handbook: Craft (50%), Originality (30%), and Resonance (20%). Facilitators can help the panel move to a consensus by providing strategies to streamline conversations and to break an impasse if the judges get stuck. **However, they should not participate in title deliberations or attempt to influence the panel’s choice of finalists in any way.**
- At 10 a.m., please join us in the Zoom “orientation room” linked above. We will review rules briefly for the benefit of the judges. You will then log off and join a *second* meeting specific to your category. Check your email for this Zoom link. Once your three judges have joined the panel room, please facilitate each person introducing themselves — their name, their career, where they live, and whether or not they’ve judged before.
- As the discussion unfolds, please take typewritten notes. We ask that you capture salient points about each title that appears to be in serious contention. (Obviously, you won’t know which are the finalists until towards the end.) “Pros” and “cons” pertaining to any of the three judging criteria are particularly appreciated.

- Judges have been asked to fill out a brief evaluation form on each nominee in their category. Your panelists may or may not refer to these written notes over the course of the morning's discussion. If a "memory jog" seems prudent, recommend that they reference this paperwork. Conversely, if anyone seems *over*-reliant on these evaluations (particularly the quantitative component), remind them that the form is just a primer. They are welcome to deviate in their comments and opinions – indeed, we hope that conversation with their colleagues will uncover a few fresh insights!
- All judges have been asked to come to the panel with a list of 5-10 books that they feel best meet the three criteria stated above. Help your panel get off on the right foot by focusing discussion on each judge's top selections. In an in-person setting, judges often find value in stacking their "favorites" on the tabletop and beginning the conversation by discussing obvious commonalities between the three stacks. This strategy can be adapted for videoconference if the facilitator is willing to capture/compare lists of Top 10 titles. Screensharing or Zoom's in-built annotation board function can help you with this. Note: You are NOT obligated to pursue any of these strategies. Defer to your experience and to the preferences of the judges.
- As your last task, please email david@thefriends.org with (1) the time at which your panel wrapped, (2) a list of the four finalists, and (3) your typewritten notes. You may attach a Word or Notepad doc, or simply share #3 in the body of an email. Notes do NOT need to be polished. However, if you *do* choose to revisit and refine your notes, email David about #1-2 immediately and mention that notes will be forthcoming.

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Common Problem Scenarios + Resolution Strategies

Category Placement / Eligibility Questions. In many cases, assigning a Minnesota Book Awards category designation is not a clearcut decision. Phrased another way, some books could conceivably be eligible in *multiple* categories. However, no book can be entered in more than one. In such cases, program staff evaluate the entry closely and make a final determination in partnership with the submitter. Eligibility questions, likewise, should have been addressed well ahead of time.

If judges inquire why a given book is considered part of ABC category and not XYZ category, feel free to explain this process. Remind them to assess the book only against the criteria - and within the parameters specific to - *their* category. In the rare event that a judge voices a strong objection at this late stage, please rope David into the conversation right away. Text him at 920-366-2220 and he will send an MNBA team member to assist you ASAP.

Conversation Scope Creep. In every category there is the potential for judges to feel they are comparing “apples to oranges.” If judges express this frustration, please remind them that their charge is to evaluate each book *individually* based on how well it meets the three weighted criteria (Craft, Originality, and Resonance).

An author’s previous work, awards, and personal life should not factor into MNBA deliberations. Conversation should instead focus on the title at hand. While judges know this from their handbook, some panelists are likely to have encountered competing authors in other contexts. It can be natural to want to volunteer additional information gleaned in this way. If you see this happen, gently remind the judges to restrict their critiques or praise to the book in question.

Reticent Participation / Dominating Participation. Be on the lookout for a judge who appears to be dominating the discussion (unintentionally or otherwise). Conversely, be mindful of panelists who appear reticent to jump into the conversation or share their thoughts. In either case, interject at a logical moment and expressly invite the unheard individual/s to weigh in. Ordinarily, each group finds its rhythm and etiquette prompts of this sort are not needed after the first 20 minutes of conversation.

If you feel that a judge’s statements, rebuttals or general behavior may be making other participants uncomfortable, you might send them a private chat message through Zoom. If severe enough, alert David immediately. At your discretion, you may also wait and inform a Friends team member as staff make the rounds through the various Zoom rooms.

Cultural Insensitivity / Prejudiced Statements. In every category, judges are called on to evaluate books from authors (and about subjects) rooted in cultural contexts and lived experiences different from their own. Judges are asked to approach all such books with sensitivity and empathy. Part and parcel with this, panelists must be mindful of their outsider perspective and the limitations this presents. Judges should not make generalizations, guesses, or other unsubstantiated statements about communities, cultures, and languages with which they do not identify.

Facilitators should not hesitate to intervene and redirect the conversation if any judge makes this sort of inappropriate comment. If you are unaccustomed to leading difficult discussions of this nature, take a moment to peruse these two concise, vetted resources:

- [*Calling In and Calling Out Guide*](#) (Source: Harvard University Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging)
- [*Speaking Up Without Tearing Down*](#) (Source: Learning For Justice)

As noted above, you are also welcome to seek Friends staff assistance at any point it feels prudent.

Impasse Scenario. If your panel reaches an impasse, you may decide to administer a rank vote. In this model, each judge ranks their top four books in descending order. Facilitator awards each “first choice title” 4 points, “second choice title” 3 points, “third choice title” 2 points, and “fourth choice title” 1 point. When these numbers are tallied, finalists may emerge – or titles may be eliminated from contention, bringing the panel a step closer to its choice of finalists. (This process can, of course, be modified to address the number of books still under consideration.) The Zoom chat feature is particularly useful in making these rankings and providing a visual reminder.

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Talking Points (“Script”)

While you are not required to adhere rigidly to this “script,” the below encapsulates procedural points, announcements and reminders we ask you to share with your panel.

1. Introduce yourself, and restate in brief the purpose of the facilitator role.
2. Invite a round-table introduction of judges, including: (1) occupation, (2) any other affiliations or passions they care to share, and (3) the number of times they have participated in the Book Awards.
3. Remind judges of the following:
 - Evaluations should adhere to the weighted criteria outlined in the judging handbook [Craft/Craftsmanship (50%), Originality (30%), and Resonance (20%)].
 - Written evaluations are an encouraged aid – but these ratings and rankings are by no means set in stone. Conversation around a given title often brings to light merits or flaws that a judge did not initially see when reading that book.
 - If a judge has a relationship with an author in the competition – or some other attachment that could be perceived as a conflict of interest – they should mention those ties when that title comes up for discussion. However, they are still welcomed to weigh in on that book if they feel they can be objective.
 - Invite the judges to private message you via Zoom’s chat feature if a fellow judge says or does anything that makes them feel uncomfortable and/or requires attention from the facilitator.

[Expect to be relatively quiet throughout deliberations. Per the above, insert yourself into the conversation only when needed for (1) the integrity of the program, (2) smoothness of the process, or (3) comfort of the participating judges.]

4. Once the finalist slate is known, offer these last housekeeping notes:
 - Remind them to refer to their email correspondence with David Katz for details on how to return books and eval forms. Note that they are welcome to keep any non-finalist titles in their possession that they have grown particularly attached to.
 - Ask them to fill out the SurveyMonkey judge survey.
 - Encourage them to follow The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library on social media to learn the other finalist announcements as they come in; and to check thefriends.org the following week for details about the Tuesday, May 2 gala.
 - Thank everyone on behalf of the program, and cut them loose!

Thank you, again, for agreeing to facilitate! Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions that occur to you between now and the judging date.



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