*Romance Writers of Australia Inc*

*is proud to announce...*

**The Opal Award 2024**

**for unpublished writers of romance**

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| **Opening date:**  | Monday 4 March 2024. Online entries only. |
| **Closing date:** | **The Word will be capped at the first 90 eligible entries.** Once 90 eligible entries have been received, the contest will close to further entries.**Deadline for last eligible entry is 5.00pm Sydney time, Monday 25 March 2024.**  |
| **Eligibility:** | RWAust members and non-members: Aspiring and Emerging authors with no romantic fiction 40K+ commercially available or contracted. |
| **Judging:** | Preliminary judging is by writers. Each entry will receive 3 scoresheets. The six highest scoring entries will be read and ranked by a selected panel of RWA established authors. |
| **Entry specifications:** | First 10,000 words (maximum) of your unpublished, novel-length (40K+) romance/romantic elements manuscript, plus a 1,000 word (maximum) synopsis. Use exact computer word count. |
| **No. of entries:** | Maximum of TWO entries per person |
| **Entry fees:** | $30 incl GST AUD, per entry: |
| **Prize:** | 1st ~ 10 hours with an RWA mentor.2nd ~ 5 hours with an RWA mentor3rd ~ 1 hours with an RWA mentorThe mentor would be chosen by the panel of RWA established authors as the most appropriate to work with the author. |
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| **Queries:** | **Contest Coordinator: contest@romancaustralia.com** |

**ENTRY CONDITIONS**

**RWA Inc. reserves the right not to accept entries that do not comply with the entry conditions. The contest coordinator's decision in this regard is final.**

1. The Opal Award is for a partial manuscript and synopsis from a romance (or romantic elements) novel (40K+) that is not commercially available or contracted for publication.
2. Works that are commercially available are not eligible for entry into this competition. For the purposes of this contest, RWA deems ‘commercially available’ to mean: any work of fiction *(or part of)* that is *(or has been at any time)* available for purchase or download in any format for any price including free:
	1. in any marketplace where books are available *(this shall include physical or digital bookstores, a publisher's website or store, and any other retailer or distribution outlet for books in any format);*
	2. at any other venue where the work includes *(or is followed by)* links to non-free content, or otherwise appears with the intent of selling or encouraging purchase of any of the author's works *(this shall include story-sharing or file-sharing sites, blogs, social media sites and other author websites.)*
3. The projected word length of the completed manuscript from which your entry is taken must be 40,000 words or over (novel-length) for your entry to be eligible. Entries taken from novellas cannot be accepted.
4. Open to all RWA members and non-members who have not been published or accepted for publication in novel-length (40,000+ words) romantic fiction. This means Aspiring and Emerging writers who are not contracted for publication, and have no works of romantic fiction 40K+ commercially available. Previously published authors MAY be eligible to enter and will be decided on a case-by-case basis, taking into account contract/publication date, book availability and whether you are actively promoting yourself as a published author. To request a ruling, contact the contest coordinator prior to the contest deadline.
5. Members are not allowed to judge for contests they have entered. Contest Coordinators may not enter or judge a contest they are managing by may enter or judge for another contest.
6. If after submitting his/her/their entry, the entrant accepts an offer of publication for any romantic fiction manuscript 40K+, or makes such a manuscript commercially available, during the judging period (from submission of entry to the public announcement of finalists), the entrant is no longer eligible to enter, and must contact the contest coordinator to arrange for his/her/their entry(ies) to be withdrawn. If finalists have already been announced when the entrant accepts the offer of publication, no withdrawal is required, finalist placings will stand, and the entry remains eligible to win prizes.
7. The definition of ‘romance’ implies the romantic development of a relationship between the protagonists, and includes all romantic novel markets, heat levels and sub-genres, i.e. category romance, single title contemporary, historical, Regency, futuristic, fantasy, paranormal, time travel, romantic suspense, erotic romance, chick lit, young adult, new adult, LGBTQIA, rural/outback, inspirational, science fiction. Entries from novels with romantic elements (where romantic development between the protagonists is a subplot) are also eligible. Judges will judge your entry based on the information you give, so **contact the contest coordinator in advance if you are unsure of the correct sub-genre.** If your entry includes explicit sex, mark the applicable box on the entry form. This is to help us allocate your entry to judges familiar with those elements.
8. Entry numbers will be capped at the first ninety (90) eligible entries in order of receipt by the coordinator. Once 90 eligible entries are admitted, the contest will close to further entries.
9. The entrant must be the original author of every entry they submit. Entries by joint authors are permitted. Fan-fiction (stories using characters, settings, worlds or other elements that belong to someone else) is not eligible. Entries must be text only, no images.
10. RWA reserves the right, at any time during the contest, to reject entries that in the contest coordinator's opinion contain any of the following presented in a positive light or as titillation: rape, pedophilia, incest, or any other conduct that is degrading or promotes hate.
11. Up to two (2) entries per person are permitted. Copyright in the manuscript and synopsis remains with the entrant.
12. Entry fees are non-refundable once your entry is accepted. PayPal/credit card only, via the online system.
13. Judges’ decisions and scores are final. No correspondence will be entered into. If you have suggestions on the contest process, advise the coordinator by separate email.
14. Ties for finalist placings are resolved, if necessary, by highest total X-factor score. Entries must score 85% or higher in the preliminary round to be eligible to advance to the final.
15. Thank you notes to judges are welcome. Please email any thank yous to the contest coordinator, including the judge numbers, and they will be forwarded. No gifts, please.
16. If an entrant submits an AI generated work, then that entry will be disqualified, and the member may be barred from entering any competitions in the future.

**ENTRY AND FORMATTING**

1. Online entries only.
2. Your **entry** includes the **first** 10,000 words (maximum) of your romance or romantic elements novel, plus a 1,000 word (maximum) synopsis. Word count limit is exact and any words exceeding the limit will be trimmed. Entries can be shorter than these counts, but bear in mind that judges are scoring for character and plot development (see sample scoresheet on the website for details). Put the synopsis first, followed by the manuscript pages, in a single .doc document.
3. The **title page must include**: manuscript title, sub-genre and projected word count of completed manuscript. The **header must include**: manuscript title, sub-genre, and page number, starting at page 1 on the synopsis and continuing (don’t restart the numbering for your manuscript pages). **Author’s name must not appear on entries**. RWA strives to preserve anonymity between judges and entrants.
4. **Formatting:** A4 page, portrait orientation. Font: 12 pt Courier New or Times New Roman. Text is aligned left (not fully justified). Text for the synopsis and manuscript pages are double-spaced, with no blank lines between paragraphs, and the first line of each paragraph is indented 1.27 cm. Begin each chapter approx. one-third of the way down a new page. Remember, entries will not be printed. Formatting will be assessed on having your margins, indents etc. set to the specified sizes, not by the appearance of your manuscript on a printed page.
5. To ensure fairness to all entrants, and consistency and ease for judges, **all the above formatting conditions are compulsory**. If any condition is not met the entry will receive a 5-mark deduction (total, not per error), and your entry will be ranked below equivalently scored entries that do not have formatting errors. The purpose of this system is to teach entrants the proper formatting, so you are encouraged to submit your entries well in advance of the closing date, to ensure you have time to correct any errors.
6. A formatting guide is available on the website to assist you.

**Tips from the contest coordinator:**

* A sample scoresheet is available from the contest website: Check it out to see what the judges will be looking for—perhaps there are some improvements you can make before entering.
* Make sure you include the full story in your synopsis. Don’t leave out the ending, the plot twist or the resolution to the romance. Judges need to know how it ends!
* Run a spell-checker over your entry—but then ask a friend to read it, too, to check for any typos or errors you've missed.

**Tips on formatting your entry:**

* Download the formatting sample form the contest website to see what your entry should look like, and for more hints:
* Make sure your entry does not exceed 10,000 words, and your synopsis does not exceed 1,000 words. We use the count feature on MS Word. To ensure fairness to all entrants, we can't accept even one word over.
* It's best **not** to hit 'return' multiple times to start a new page. Some judges read on e-readers, and multiple returns will not appear. If you want to start a new page, use 'Insert' & 'Page Break'.
* MS Word sometimes has a default setting that inserts unwanted space between paragraphs. Click 'Format & Paragraph' and make sure 'Spacing: Before' and 'Spacing: After' are set to zero.
* To make the page numbers start at 1 on the synopsis, and not on your title page: have the page numbers start at zero, and then untick 'Show number on first page'.
* Finally: *please* don't spend hours stressing over the formatting. The rules are simple and easy to achieve—if in doubt, ask the coordinator for help.