Frequently Asked Questions

About the competition

When will the Irish Writers Centre International Debut Novel Competition 2026 take place?

The Pitch Days will take place on Thursday 10 and Friday 11 September 2026 (in-person and online).

When do submissions open?

Submissions open on Wednesday 1 April 2026 at 8am.

When is the deadline for submissions?

Friday 08 May 2026 at 5.00pm.

Will I get a publishing deal if I am selected as an International Debut Novel Competition winner?

A publishing deal is not guaranteed. The 12 selected winners will get the opportunity to pitch their novel to a selection of top publishers and agents. Since its debut, more than 37 winners have gone on to have their novels published. Often, their journey to publication began through the connections and experiences made during this annual competition. However, there is no guarantee that a winning place at the IDNC will lead to you signing with an agent and/or a publishing deal.

What happens to competition winners who don't sign with a publisher or agent?

While some of the 12 selected winners go on to sign with publishers or agents, this isn't the sole benefit to winning the competition. Previous winners have used their success at the Competition to help them progress further, such as gaining entry into prestigious Creative Writing MFA programmes to advance their careers in the arts sector. We would like to emphasise that our competition is just one step (and a very early one at that) on the long journey of a successful writing life. For example, Aingeala Flannery won a place in 2018 with a

novel that did not go on to be published but her debut, *The Amusements* was published by Penguin Sandycove in 2022 (and went on to win the Kerry Group Novel of the Year award!).

If I'm selected as one of the 12 winners, will I receive feedback on my 5,000 words before presenting the finished work to agents/publishers?

In preparation for the Pitch Days, winners will participate in a one-day online workshop with a focus on crafting their pitch and what to expect from their encounters during the Pitch Days.

What will happen during the two Pitch Days?

The mission is to facilitate first encounters between unpublished (and unsigned) novelists and members of the publishing industry. Over the course of the two days, these encounters will take the form of a series of 15-minute meetings with publishers and agents where the 12 winners are given the opportunity to pitch their novels.

About my submission

How much of my novel should I submit?

Submit 5,000 words (-/+ 10%)

Are there any rules on how to format my text for submission?

We recommend that applicants format their manuscripts in a standard clear font (e.g. Times New Roman), font size 12, double-spaced with page numbers. The competition is judged anonymously. The applicant's name must not appear anywhere on the synopsis or manuscript.

How long should my synopsis be?

500 words (-/+ 10%)

I've never written a synopsis before, what should I do?

The aim of the synopsis is to summarise your novel in its entirety including every pertinent twist and turn. The goal with the synopsis is to accurately transmit the entirety of your 50,000+ word novel in only 500 words.

Can I submit random chapters from my novel?

In most cases, we advise writers to submit consecutive chapters. This is to help the judges get a proper sense of the plot and/or characterisation. However in some cases this may not be appropriate and it may be best to submit a non-consecutive selection of chapters from your novel. For example, 2019 winner Alice Lyons (author of *Oona*, Lilliput 2020) said this about her manuscript selection: "I included a big chunk of the beginning to orient the reader, and then I chose a chunk from the New Jersey section and the Irish section so they (the judges) could see the geographic reach and the various ways of conjuring place". You can read the rest of our interview with Alice here.

Will I hear from anyone after I submit?

You will receive an automatic email response when your payment and manuscript have been received. All applicants will be notified on their application outcome whether selected or not.

Is the entry fee refundable?

No refunds will be given.

How can I pay for entry fee?

You can pay the entry fee when you submit your novel online using Submittable.

Why does my submission cost 65 euros?

While we are aware that €65 is a comparatively expensive entry fee for a writing competition, we believe that the International Debut Novel Competition is a singular opportunity on the literary calendar and offers a unique chance for emerging writers to gain an insight into the publishing industry. We must also stress that the majority of money received through the IDNC entry fees goes towards paying our judges, as well as covering the rest of the vast administrative costs that go into running a large competition.

I can't afford to pay the submission fee. Are there any free places?

We offer 10 free entries for student / unwaged or senior, proof will be required. More details on how to receive a free submission will be available in April 2026 on the Irish Writers Centre website.

Eligibility

Can I enter with my novel of under 50,000 words?

No. While we appreciate that the novel is a malleable form and that some classics of the form are under our 50,000 word limit, our guidelines are designed to reflect the interests of the publishers and agents and represent the industry standards more generally.

Does my novel need to be completed?

The shortlisted applicants will be contacted in August 2026, and they will have one week to show proof of their completed novel. The novel should be a minimum of 50,000.

Can I enter with memoir, autobiography or true stories?

No, we only accept works of fiction in the novel form of at least 50,000 words. We accept hybrid forms of genre and fiction/nonfiction hybrid works, including autofiction/experimental memoir e.g. fiction heavily based on real life.

Can I enter with novellas, short stories or poetry?

No, we only accept works of fiction in the novel form of at least 50,000 words.

Can I enter if I have self-published a book before?

If the applicant has a self-published novel with an ISBN, the applicant can apply as long as they meet ALL below conditions which the applicant must be able to provide evidence of upon request:

- The sample submitted should not be from the published novel (i.e. the Competition will only accept new, original work).
- The applicant has a maximum of one self-published novel with an ISBN. The self-published novel must not have sold more than 1,000 copies through any medium (i.e. print or e-book).

- In the process of publication the applicant has not successfully engaged with or had access to a professional publisher, distributor or editor.
- The self-published novel has not been reviewed professionally (i.e. by any recognised print or broadcast media, or online review).

Can I enter if I have an agent/representation?

No, the competition is limited to unpublished novelists who have not signed with any agents or publishers. Applicants who have already had a novel accepted by a publisher, or have previously had a novel published, will not be eligible.

Can I enter if I have had a short story or an essay published in an anthology?

Yes, in this case you would be eligible. As long as you haven't published a novel in its entirety.

Can I enter if I have published an academic monograph?

Yes, in this case you would be eligible. As long as you haven't published a novel in its entirety.

Can I enter if I have published a non-fiction book?

Yes, in this case you would be eligible. As long as you haven't published a novel in its entirety.

Can I enter if I've written a novel for children?

Yes, in this case you would be eligible. As long as you haven't published a novel in its entirety. However, in order to manage your expectations, we must flag that, while you may be selected as one of our 12 winners, the majority of publishers and agents who attend the competition are primarily involved in fiction that is geared towards an adult audience.

Can I enter the competition if I have submitted in previous years (formerly known as Novel Fair)?

Yes, you can submit again. Some former winners have been highly commended or runners-up in previous years.

Can I enter more than once in the same year?

No, we allow only one submission per writer per year.

My novel isn't based in Ireland. Will the publishers and agents be interested in my novel?

We really can't say what will be of interest to the publishers and agents that attend the competition. We do have international representation at our Pitch Days, however a large majority of publishers and agents who attend work only in the Irish publishing industry.

Is the competition for Irish novelists only?

Entries are welcome from anywhere in the world. However, in order to be eligible, applicants must be available to attend the two Pitch Days, either in-person or online.

Will my work be accepted if I used AI to write parts of it?

Your submission must be your own work. Writers may not make submissions that have used AI in their creation, whether in the outlining or writing of the manuscript. We have taken this stance on AI to reflect most publishing contracts that require authors to warrant that the work

submitted will be original to them. The inclusion of AI-generated text in the final manuscript will violate this warranty, as the text is not considered “original” to the author.

Do you have a question about your application? Please email ***IDNC@irishwriterscentre.ie*** *for further enquiries.*