



ADVICE FOR VOLUNTEER READERS – THE ORWELL YOUTH PRIZE 2023

By Elizabeth Ryan

Hi there!

I'm so pleased you're reading this as this means you're interested in being a first draft reader for this year's Orwell Youth Prize. It is indeed this that sets this competition for young people apart from all the others.

Whilst there are competitions that have given feedback on submitted entries I don't know of any other competitions other than this one that gives feedback on a first draft.

Anyone who wants to write professionally will know that getting fair and objective feedback is **crucial**. Writing something from scratch can be like raising a child – you are so close to it, and because of this there may be things you don't notice.

Having a piece assessed by someone impartial (not family or friends) means an honest assessment will be made which will focus in on both strengths and flaws. An example I experienced was when I was writing a screenplay. There was a scene of the lead character reading the classifieds in a local paper and circling adverts. I initially wrote this as "circling adverts with a pen". This was noticed by a writing group reader who said, "Is there any need to write 'with a pen?'"

No, of course there wasn't. What I was trying to convey was that the character was circling adverts. It was inconsequential what instrument s/he was using to do this. I wouldn't have realised this had it not been noticed.

Giving feedback on Orwell Youth Prize entries means that the entrants can amend or change these things before they submit the final draft which will comprise their entry. And that entry will be much improved as a result of the feedback they've been given.

So, what do you need to volunteer? An arts and/or humanities degree (BA or above) would be extremely helpful, as would experience working in publishing, academia or the arts. If you don't have these, it doesn't matter. You can submit a CV to the Orwell Team and tell them about other experience which might be helpful to you as a reader. There will also be an online training session and a volunteer e-book. We now move on to the most crucial aspect – **time commitment**.

It is crucial that each piece is given the respect it deserves. Writing feedback on each piece takes about 30 minutes but reading and assessing it can take longer. I got caught out by this doing feedback in a previous competition. It is **vital** that readers give the team their time availability and inform the team if they are struggling with this. We have a commitment to the young people who enter, and we must honour that.

And if after giving feedback, you would like to assist with shortlisting entries you can, but again you will need to commit a confirmed amount of time to the team. You can also put any volunteering you do on your CV and have a reference done if you need one.

But most important of all, **have fun!** And **good luck!**