sport, arts & culture
Department:
Sport, Arts and Culture
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL LITERARY AWARDS

JUDGING PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL LITERARY AWARDS

A Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) Initiative

JUDGING PROCESS AND PROCEDURES: 2026/27 Edition

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR GREATNESS



1. JUDGING PROCESS AND PROCEDURES

1.1 OVERVIEW OF THE JUDGING PROCESS

The National Literary Awards judging process is designed to ensure fairness, transparency, and the highest standards of literary evaluation. The process comprises:

- **Two distinct phases:** Nominee Selection and Winner Selection.
- **Specialised panels:** Separate panels for each category, composed of experts in the relevant fields.
- **Independent oversight:** A reputable firm of auditors oversees the voting process.
- **Confidentiality:** All judging activities and results are embargoed until the official announcement.

1.2 OVERALL CHAIRPERSON OF THE JUDGING COMMITTEE

A. Appointment

DSAC shall appoint an Overall Chairperson of the Judging Committee. The Chairperson shall be a person of experience, ability, and integrity within the South African literary sector.

B. Term

The Overall Chairperson shall serve a term of three consecutive years to ensure continuity of the process. The Minister reserves the right to review the chairpersonship.

C. Roles and Responsibilities

The Overall Chairperson shall:

- Convene meetings of the judging panels as and when required.
- Guide panels on their roles, responsibilities, and adherence to judging rules.
- Rule on disputes regarding interpretation of judging criteria or procedures.
- Ensure the judging process is free, fair, and conducted with integrity.
- Ensure that no member of the Planning Committee serves as a judge.
- Certify the final results in consultation with the auditors and DSAC.



- Ensure adherence to confidentiality as required.

D. Authority

The Overall Chairperson will ensure that all recommendations of the judges are submitted to the relevant authority.

The adjudication panel will shortlist, provide motivation for three nominations on each of the categories and recommend the ultimate winners.

Ministerial Awards: The adjudication panel will shortlist and recommend three for each of the Ministerial Awards and provide motivation, and the Minister will select from the shortlist.

1.3 JUDGING PANELS: STRUCTURE AND APPOINTMENT

1.3.1 Panel Composition

Panel Type	Number of Panels	Judges per Panel	Expertise Required
Language-Specific Panels	11	3-5 per panel	Native proficiency in the language; minimum 8 years' experience in literature, publishing, or academia
Cross-Cutting Panels	2 (Lifetime Achievement Award and Children's Book Award)	3-5 per panel	Expertise in the specific genre or discipline
Industry Panel	1 (Value Chain Awards)	3-5 per panel	Expertise in publishing, bookselling, distribution, or literary administration



1.3.2 Judge Appointment Process

A. Call for Nominations

DSAC shall issue a public call for nominations of qualified individuals to serve as judges. Nominations may be submitted by:

- Publishers and publishing houses
- Literary organisations and NGOs
- Academic institutions
- Professional bodies
- Members of the public

B. Selection Criteria

Judges shall be selected based on:

- A minimum of 8 years' professional experience in the relevant field.
- Demonstrated expertise and standing in the literary sector.
- A reputation for integrity, impartiality, and fairness.
- Representation across age, gender, ethnicity, and geographical location.
- For language panels, native proficiency in the language.

C. Approval

The Planning Committee shall review nominations and submit a recommended list of judges to DSAC for final approval.

D. Prohibitions

The following individuals may not serve as judges:

- Sitting members of the Planning Committee.
- Current elected public officials.
- Individuals who have declared a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved.



1.4 JUDGE'S CODE OF CONDUCT

All judges must adhere to the following code of conduct:

A. Declaration of Interest

Before appointment, each judge must complete a Declaration of Interest form, disclosing:

- Any financial or professional relationship with authors, publishers, or works submitted.
- Any personal relationship with individuals whose works are entered.
- Any other interest that could reasonably be perceived to compromise impartiality.

B. Recusal

If a judge has a direct or indirect connection to a submitted work, they must:

- Declare the connection immediately upon becoming aware of it.
- Recuse themselves from all discussions and voting related to that work.
- Leave the judging room during the evaluation of that work.

C. Confidentiality

Judges must sign a Confidentiality Agreement and may not:

- Discuss any aspect of the judging process with anyone outside the panel.
- Disclose nominees or winners before the official announcement.
- Share judging materials, score cards, or deliberations, or any other related matter with third parties.

D. Impartiality

Judges must:

- Evaluate each work solely on its literary merit against the set criteria.
- Not advocate for or against any work based on personal relationships or biases.
- Base decisions on the work submitted, not on the author's personal attributes or previous works.



E. Attendance

Judges must:

- Attend all scheduled panel meetings and judging sessions.
- Notify the Chairperson in advance of any inability to attend.
- Complete all scoring and evaluations by the specified deadlines.

1.5 JUDGING PHASES

1.5.1 Phase 1: Preliminary Review and Long-Listing

Step	Description	Timeline
1. Eligibility Verification	The Secretariat verifies that all entries meet the eligibility requirements. Ineligible entries are removed from consideration.	Week 1
2. Materials Distribution	Eligible works are distributed to the relevant judging panels.	Week 2
3. Independent Reading	Each judge reads all works assigned to their panel, completing individual score cards.	Week 3
4. Long-Listing	Panels meet to discuss works and agree on a long list of works that merit further consideration. The number of long-listed works is at the panel's discretion.	Week -4



1.5.2 Phase 2: Nominee Selection

Step	Description	Timeline
1. Focused Reading	Judges re-read and conduct in-depth analysis of long-listed works.	Week 5
2. Nominee Deliberation	Panels meet to discuss long-listed works, guided by the set judging criteria for nomination.	Week 6
3. Nominee Voting	Panels vote to select 3 to 5 nominees per category. Voting is conducted by secret ballot. In the event of a tie, the Chairperson casts the deciding vote.	Week 7
4. Nominee Submission	The list of nominees, with supporting score cards and motivation, is submitted to the DSAC and auditors.	Week 8

1.5.3 Phase 3: Winner Selection

Step	Description	Timeline
1. Final Deliberation	Panels meet to discuss the nominated works, focusing on distinguishing factors and relative merits.	Week 9
2. Winner Voting	Panels vote to select a single winner per category. Voting is conducted by secret ballot.	Week 9
3. Winner Motivation	The panel Chairperson prepares a written motivation for the winner, detailing the reasons for selection.	Week 9



Step	Description	Timeline
4. Auditor Verification	The auditors verify that all voting procedures were followed correctly and that the results are accurate.	Week 10

1.5.4 Phase 4: Announcement

Step	Description	Timeline
1. Embargo	All results are strictly embargoed (Confidential) until the official announcement.	-
2. Nominee Announcement	Nominees are announced to the public via press release and media engagement.	February 2027
3. Winner Announcement	Winners are announced at the official National Literary Awards Ceremony.	February 2027

1.6 VOTING PROCEDURES

1.6.1 Nominee Selection Voting

Element	Detail
Method	Secret ballot
Process	Each judge votes for up to 5 works from the long-list. Votes are tallied. The works with the highest number of votes become nominees.
Minimum Nominees	3 nominees per category



Element	Detail
Maximum Nominees	5 nominees per category
Tie-Breaking	In the event of a tie for the final nominee position, the panel discusses the tied works and conducts a second round of voting limited to the tied works.

1.6.2 Winner Selection Voting

Element	Detail
Method	Secret ballot
Process	After deliberation, each judge votes for one work from the list of nominees.
Majority Requirement	The winner is the work that receives the majority of votes (50% + 1).
Run-Off	If no work receives a majority in the first round, the work with the fewest votes is eliminated, and a new vote is held. This process repeats until a winner is identified.
Chairperson's Vote	In the event of a persistent tie, the Chairperson casts the deciding vote.

1.7 JUDGING CRITERIA IMPLEMENTATION

1.7.1 Score Card Usage

Each judge shall complete a score card for every work they evaluate. Score cards are structured as follows:



Criteria	Description	Weight	Score (1-10)	Weighted Score
Criterion 1	[Detailed description]	X%		
Criterion 2	[Detailed description]	X%		
...	...	...	...	...
TOTAL		**100%**		**/10**

1.7.2 Scoring Guidelines

Score	Rating	Description
1-2	Poor	Does not meet basic standards; significant shortcomings.
3-4	Below Average	Meets few criteria; noticeable weaknesses.
5-6	Good	Competent work; meets expectations but lacks distinction.
7-8	Excellent	High level of achievement; stands out in several areas.
9-10	Outstanding	A benchmark work; exceptional in nearly all respects.

1.7.3 Deliberation Guidelines

During panel deliberations, judges are expected to:

- Base discussions on the set criteria and score card results.
- Respect the opinions of fellow panel members.
- Avoid personal attacks or dismissive language.
- Focus on the literary merits of the works under consideration.



- Maintain confidentiality about the deliberations.

1.8 JUDGING VENUES, DATES, AND TIMES

A. Venues

Judging sessions shall be held at venues that:

- Are accessible to all panel members.
- Provide adequate space for reading, discussion, and voting.
- Ensure confidentiality and security of judging materials.

B. Dates and Times

- The judging schedule shall be communicated to all judges in advance prior to the commencement of judging.
- Judges are expected to commit to the full judging period as stipulated.

C. Virtual Participation

Virtual participation in judging sessions may be permitted with the prior approval of the Chairperson, provided that:

- The judge has access to all necessary materials.
- Confidentiality can be maintained.
- The judge can fully participate in discussions and voting.

1.9 JUDGE'S COMPENSATION

A. Honorarium

Judges shall receive an honorarium in line with Treasury guidelines for public sector advisory panels.

B. Reimbursement



Judges shall be reimbursed for reasonable travel and accommodation expenses incurred in attending mandatory judging sessions, subject to submission of receipts and prior approval.

C. Invitations

All judges shall be invited to:

- The Nominee Announcement event.
- The National Literary Awards Ceremony.

1.10 AUDITORS

A. Appointment

The Planning Committee shall appoint a reputable firm of auditors to oversee the entry and judging processes. The auditors shall be independent of the judging panels and the NLA Committee.

B. Roles and Responsibilities

The auditors shall:

- Advise on the design of entry and judging procedures.
- Verify that all entries meet eligibility requirements.
- Observe voting sessions where appropriate.
- Review score cards and voting records.
- Certify that all procedures were followed correctly.
- Provide a written report to the Planning Committee confirming the integrity of the process.

C. Authority

The auditors have the authority to:

- Request access to all judging materials and records.
- Raise concerns about procedural irregularities.
- Require that a vote be re-held if irregularities are found.

8.11 COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES PROCEDURE



A. Grounds for Complaint

Complaints may be lodged on the following grounds only:

- Procedural irregularity in the judging process.
- Failure to adhere to published eligibility criteria.
- Conflict of interest not properly declared or managed.

B. Complaints Process

Step	Description
1. Submission	Complaints must be lodged in writing to the Overall Chairperson and the Planning Committee within 14 days of the complainant becoming aware of the grounds for complaint.
2. Acknowledgment	The Planning Committee shall acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 7 days.
3. Investigation	The Planning Committee, in consultation with the auditors, shall investigate the complaint.
4. Response	A written response shall be provided within 30 days of receipt of the complaint.
5. Finality	Any decision made by the Planning Committee shall be final and binding. No further correspondence will be entered into.

C. Confidentiality

All complaints and responses shall be treated as confidential.

1.12 DISQUALIFICATION AND REDIRECTION

A. Disqualification



Entries may be disqualified if:

- The entry does not meet the eligibility requirements.
- The entry contains false or misleading information.
- The entrant fails to provide required documentation.
- The entrant engages in conduct that compromises the integrity of the awards.

B. Redirection of Entries

If an entry is submitted to an incorrect category, the Planning Committee may, at its discretion, redirect the entry to the most appropriate category, provided that:

- The entry meets the eligibility requirements for the new category.
- The entry has not already been evaluated in the original category.
- The entrant is notified of the redirection.

C. Categories with Insufficient Entries

Any category that receives three or fewer eligible entries shall be at the judges' discretion as to whether to proceed to the judging phase. If the judges determine not to proceed:

- No award shall be presented in that category for the current cycle.
- Entries may be redirected to other categories at the judges' discretion.
- If no suitable alternative category exists, the entries shall be withdrawn.

1.13 ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESULTS

A. Nominee Announcement

Nominees shall be announced at a dedicated Nominee Announcement event in February of the awards year. The announcement shall include:

- The list of nominees for each category.
- Biographical information for each nominee.
- Motivations for nomination (prepared by the judging panels).

B. Winner Announcement



Winners shall be announced at the National Literary Awards Ceremony in March of the awards year. The announcement shall be made by the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture or their designate.

C. Embargo

All results are strictly embargoed until the official announcements. Judges, panel members, and NLA staff may not disclose results to any third party prior to the official announcements.

D. Press Release

A comprehensive press release announcing the winners shall be issued immediately following the awards ceremony. The press release is the definitive source of winner information.

8.14 CERTIFICATES AND TROPHIES

A. Nominee Certificates

All individual nominees shall receive a certificate of nomination, issued in their name.

B. Winner Certificates and Trophies

All winners shall receive:

- A National Literary Awards winner's certificate.
- The official National Literary Awards trophy.

For team awards (e.g., co-authored works), only one trophy shall be presented, but certificates shall be issued to each named author.

C. Presentation

Trophies and certificates shall be presented at the awards ceremony. In the event that a winner cannot attend, arrangements shall be made for delivery following the ceremony.

