



How to win
CREATIVE
COMPETITIONS



ANOTHER FREE GUIDE FROM
Compers News
AND
The **Prize** Finder.com
Finding the competitions you really want

INTRODUCTION TO

CREATIVE COMPETITIONS

Prepare to dazzle yourself! This guide will give you hints and tips about how to increase your chances of winning creative competitions. From writing a caption, or taking a photo, inventing a cake, to sending in films caught on your phones – we have something for you!

The guide pages are split into categories (Photography, Kids, Slogans/captions, writing, film and other). Each skill section will give ideas and handy tips and hints to give you a great start.

Please remember **CREATIVITY WILL WIN** – not necessarily the skill level. In fact, in most cases – a badly executed idea that will win over an expertly produced rubbish idea – these guides are to help you become confident in improving your skills so that you can enter more **effortlessly** and so get more enjoyment out of them.

Variety is the spice of life! Random winning in prize draw can sometimes go in our favour, and sometimes not. A dry run is the perfect time to enter creative competitions because it shakes you up!

Not Creative? Pah! Everyone is creative in some way! Everyone has ideas. Everyone can win creative competitions. Most creative competitions only require a very little effort. You can spend a dreary morning learning one skill that you fancy having – and you will **NEVER HAVE TO RELEARN IT!** Once you have learnt a small skill – you'll want to test it out!

Weapon of Choice? Once you are in touch with your skillset – use your particular passions to win! Maybe you like general things like gardening, cooking, interiors, outdoor pursuits, watching TV, comedy or news or cakes?

Feel Good Factor! Whatever your weapon – use it to win! Winning a prize based on your efforts has the feel-good-factor. The feeling a creative/skill-based prize is very different from randomly winning. Try it and see!

Slowly, slowly, catchy monkey! Have you heard that phrase? If you are new to creative competitions, start with the lower effort ones. Build your confidence. Maybe choose a skill you are already familiar with like photographing and build on that first.

Boost Your Wins! Creative competitions tend to have a lower entry rate than prize draws. If you can do twenty randomly drawn competitions – why would you concentrate on one? Well! You are counting on that attitude! That attitude makes the entry count lower!

So... what are you waiting for! Have a browse through the creative competitions now, and then come back to the guide for a heads up – or read through the guide for some inspiration – the choice is yours! **Good Luck!**

READY TO START WINNING?

Turn over for our beginners guide to the different types of competitions

PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITIONS

Social media is a visual place, and promoters love to run a photography competition. For your visual amusement, using the powers of acrostic – we have collected all the winning photography competition tips you will ever need into the word: **BEST LOVED CRAFT!**

B is for Background – Taking care of the background of your photograph is important because the eye naturally wanders. Domestic settings need to be clean and tidy, and no odd behavior should detract from the focus of your picture.

E is for Early Entry – Get in early. Most people enter towards the deadline and it would be a shame for your brilliant photograph to be lost in the closing date deluge.

S is for Stick to the Topic – Promoters want to see that you are listening. A photograph that hints towards a theme is not going to win because other entrants might argue. Make your theme obvious.

T is for Thirds – It is instinctual to place the object in the centre of your picture, but everyone does that, and it is a mark of an amateur. Turning your gridlines on and lining your subject on the intersection lines achieves an artist take and will stand out from the crowd. Your focal point should be a third of the way in from the frame.

L is for Lighting – Many photography sites advise you to take pictures on a cloudy day to avoid glare. However, if you are out on a sunny day, ensure the light is behind you. If you are taking pictures of people, do this at an angle if the sun is too bright – squinting frowns will not achieve a good shot!

O is for Ownership – Read the terms and conditions – if you enter a competition, the likelihood that your photo becomes the property of the promoter is high – particularly if it contains their product. It is a good idea to feature the promoter's product in your shot, but you will not then be able to reuse it for another competition. You need to decide what is right for you for each competition.

V is for Volume – when taking photographs, take large volumes. Digital and phone cameras have a large storage capacity, there is no risk attached by deleting the less satisfactory ones – and you might make an astonishing fluke of genius!

E is for Exciting – Your photograph needs to stand out. The more excitement you can pack in the better. Action shots are very exciting, and a good tripod or a steady hand will ensure you get the sharpest picture. Be hilarious!

D is for Dress Up – Seasonal photograph competitions are popular, so where is the harm in visiting a costume hire shop! Bring a box of sweets and a bunch of flowers and charm your way into the owner agreeing that you and a friend can try on outfits in the store and take photos! Other than that – take lots of photos and make all your birthdays into a fancy dress theme – you never know when they will come in handy!

C is for Colour – Look online for popular contrasts. On a colour wheel, red contrasted with green and blue contrasted with yellow makes a big statement. Look at advertising logos. Companies spend a fortune on designer knowledge – trust that they know about colour and bear it in mind when you are taking your shots.

R is for Rules – Rules such as file sizes and specifications may sound boring, but they are essential. If your photo is too large or small, or in the wrong dimensions: all your hard work will come to nothing! All information is contained in the terms and conditions.

A is for Attractions and Avoiding Clichés – Public attractions are useful for the more exciting shots. Theme photograph competitions are always looking for a powerful image that captures the theme completely – so keep a look out for local festivals and public attractions – they could win you big prizes! Avoiding clichés is important because lazy, uncreative entrants will enter the same kind of image. Think outside the box while keeping the topic in the forefront of your mind.

F is for Foreground – Several professional photographers argue that landscape pictures can be dramatically improved with an interesting foreground. The eye usually sees the picture from the bottom up so an unusual rabbit hole or a gate will make that mountain look all the more splendid as well as adding something different to your shot.

T is for Tale – If a picture paints a thousand words, then a photo can do the same. Emotions are captured well through photography. The whole effect of your composition might want to comment without words; perhaps an elderly lady looking at face cream or a politician buying a newspaper. Telling stories through pictures is a great way to show the promoter that you have put a lot of thought into the work, and that same thought might give you an edge.

! is for exclamation! If someone says WOW – that photo is in with a great chance of winning. If it makes someone laugh – then it might make the promoter laugh. There is no accounting for taste, and nothing is guaranteed, but raising a WOW is a definite indication that your photo is not boring.

Good luck – remember **BEST LOVED CRAFT** the next time you are taking photos!



VIDEO COMPETITIONS

These are EASY! Your odds are HIGH! Entry levels are the lowest for film because common myths create a barrier, so before we start on how to win them - let's bust some myths:

MYTH: THEY TAKE TOO MUCH TIME

No. Most short film competitions are between 90 seconds and 3 minutes. These are maximum times; you could easily submit a shorter film.

MYTH: YOU NEED ACTORS AND A SCRIPT

No. Silent films with a music background are the most common types. YouTube is one of the most popular social media outlets for a reason – it's easy! A scene-by-scene action plan will help – more about this below.

MYTH: IT'S TOO TECHNICAL

No. Most competitions want to appeal to a wide audience – check in the terms and conditions, and you will find that majority of these competitions allow the use of a phone. Phone apps for video editing are the easiest way to get started – there are many free options that offer wide functionality.

MYTH: ONLY FILMMAKERS AND EXPERIENCED PEOPLE ENTER THIS TYPE OF COMPETITION

No. Professional filmmakers are more interested in making pilots and initiating their own stories rather than working to a specified theme. They will chase an accolade rather than a prize.

So! No excuses. These are EASY and with a small amount of preparation – You'll be winning in no time!

INITIAL PREPARATION

Download a video app for your phone and try it out – become familiar with uploading onto YouTube and

sending video files by testing it out. It helps to create your own YouTube Channel, as many promoters will allow you to upload directly onto your channel.

As with all competitions – Read the Terms and conditions to discover exactly what the promoter is prioritising – the main priority is usually how well the theme is explored and the entertainment value.

Using any photographic knowledge you have about lighting will help, but unlike photography competitions – short films are more likely to expect amateur productions. They want to appeal to the largest sector.

PREPARING A SCENE-BY-SCENE ACTION PLAN

This is what is called storyboarding – it's basically just a plan of different changes in the story as it moves along. Storyboarding is NOT obligatory – but can be useful to get an overall feel of how the film will flow. Many entrants use a make-it-up-as-you-go-along approach – you have to decide which feels the most appropriate way for you.

If you do decide to carefully plan your film, the construction of your plan is rather like writing a story – certain things 'happen' in the story, and these things should happen in a way that makes sense – in scenes. Similarly, there should be a strong start to the story and a strong finish – this should take up no more than 25% of the total time – leaving 75% as the main part.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- ✓ Timing: Acting out a scene takes less time than you think. Are you going to do the whole thing in one 'take' or pause and move positions?
- ✓ Are you going to video yourself, documentary style or are you going to need help – maybe you could enlist someone to film it for you as you 'act'?
- ✓ Setting – as with photography – setting the scene is important – domestic scene should be non-distracting
- ✓ Can you use the music you want? – Check the background music can be used for your purposes – a lot of video apps include default music, so use of those if you are unsure. Research the Internet for music libraries under creative commons – there is a lot more choice than you think.

Stuck for ideas? The first video is always the most daunting, so get your inner Scorsese strolling with a few of these:

- ✓ Watch adverts – Adverts are short films, they convey a message in a short period of time. They are usually built on single themes.
- ✓ Search for 'short films' on YouTube – it is surprising how sparse a video needs to be to get a message across. You'll see that a lot of popular mini short films contain a bare minimum of props or acting
- ✓ Search the Internet for 90-second short films – the smallest amounts of time can capture serious topics and you'll see how easy it would be to recreate something similar.

I hope this has given you some food-for-thought! Remember how many people AVOID these and think: Lights, Camera, Action, and PRIZE!

HOW TO WIN WRITING COMPS

Turn over for more types of creative competitions



SMALL WRITING COMPETITIONS

SLOGANS/TIE-BREAKERS

Slogan competitions are generally won by clever, relevant wordplay with a rhyme. If the promoter is asking for a slogan, your entry will draw attention if it is company specific capturing the ethos or message outlined by the promoter.

Inspiration: Use Chestnut Slogans. You can agree or disagree, but just as cheesy gags get laughs, chestnuts sometimes still win the day. Some examples here: (play around with them though – it's far nicer to win a creative competition by being creative – it's entirely up to you!) Making a chestnut of your own would be nicer, but some copy and promoters none-the-wiser!

- ✓ A leader in its class, a formula one cannot surpass.
- ✓ Action packed, full of taste, (product) meals mean no waste.
- ✓ Choice, value, taste supreme, (product) and (store) a winning team.
- ✓ Chosen with flair by people who care
- ✓ Delicious to the lips, murder on the hips.
- ✓ Even if you're a beginner you're sure to bake a winner.
- ✓ Experts perfect it, connoisseurs select it
- ✓ For flavour and style, it comes first by a mile

Researching the internet for winning slogans is also a great way to get those creative wheels oiled.

CAPTIONS

Here, the emphasis is on raising a laugh with your razor sharp wit by interpreting an image. It's harder to get away with using chestnuts in caption competitions – but it depends on the vibe of the promoter. My tip is – if it makes you laugh, it will probably make someone else laugh, that someone might be the promoter. There are several strategies at your disposal.

Keep a notebook of sentence starters – again, you can get these from researching the winning entries. You didn't tell me...

Stock phrases: Some examples: I know you said 'XYX' but that is ridiculous.

Another option is to look beyond what is actually happening and see a different take on it. Once you see it, note it down and write your weird/surreal version. This strategy is good for caption competitions with a large amount of comments because all the most obvious answers will have been regurgitated in some fashion. Something that is weirdly brilliant sometimes wins.

Does it relate to a famous book/film/song title with a letter or a similar word change? (look to twitter hashtag word games for further inspiration) When Hamburger Met Sally, The Godfather. Obviously, it's dependant on the contents within the photo.

Changing the words from a well-known cliché may raise a laugh – look at the picture. If you see a hand – could you relate it to: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush in a funny way? Something that is a twist on familiarity sometimes works – as long as it is funny and relevant.

Relating the picture to a funny topical news story is a double-edged sword. If it's truly insightful and captures the tide, it can work, but can go against you. The promoter might really laugh at your caption but won't want to offend any of the customers or chose a winner that compromises the ethos of the brand.

Many caption competitions are monthly, so look at the past winners before you enter and try to do something different.

50-100 WORD COMPETITIONS

In no more than 50-100 word competitions are different to slogan and caption competitions. Here, you will need to do a rough first draft of your answer and polish it to perfection. Usually they are asking why you should win a prize or asking you to give an example of something.

Have an idea of what you want to say and cram as many points in there as you can. It's easy to think that 50-100 words is quite a lot, but it only amounts to five/ten sentences so you'll have to be as clear as possible. Imagine telling your answer to the promoter in a lift.

THE SIX STEP SECOND DRAFT CHECK

- ✓ Does the point of what you are saying flow logically?
- ✓ Record you reading your entry aloud and then review it the next day. It's amazing how much improvement can be made after a good sleep!
- ✓ Are you varying your sentence length? A short sentence should follow a lengthy one.
- ✓ Have you said in three words that could be said in one? Cut any words ending in 'ly' and look at the word that preceded or followed it – make the remaining word stronger. For example 'I quickly ran' becomes 'I sped'.
- ✓ Rephrase for added punch: For example: 'I would especially like to win this prize because at the moment, my gran is really ill and she loves chocolates.' becomes: My poorly gran would love this prize – she's ill - chocolates would aid her recovery in a way only your chocolates can! (Same amount of 21 words - but more powerful)
- ✓ Eliminate spelling and grammar errors by running a full grammar and spelling check.



LONGER WRITING COMPETITIONS

These are much easier than you think! Longer DOES NOT MEAN MORE DIFFICULT!

It's counter-intuitive, but you may find these longer writing competitions EASIER to enter than the shorter ones because you need less conciseness of wit and brainpower. These competitions offer BIG CASH with an even lower entry rate than the shorter writing competitions, it really is worth spending more effort – the rewards can be HUGE!

Most of these competitions will ask you to write on a fiction or non-fiction theme or topic. Be prepared and you will radically increase your chances of winning!

PREPARATION

Unless a particular theme jumps out at you - Scan all the competitions on a regular basis and note down themes of interest. TOP TIP: Write down the different topics into your phone. When lightning strikes, you just open up that note and start sketching out your idea. If that sounds like a weird way of doing things – just try it! Your brain will think in the background and will subconsciously search for ideas while you get on with your life – trust me, it works!

If ideas are not coming and closing dates are approaching, then you might need to give your brain a budge by researching the keywords on the Internet. A good tip is to search the word in a dictionary to get all the different ways that the topic can be interpreted. Why not do this first? Well, it's harder work, and takes time – so just trust that your brain might deliver you an idea – if not, then researching might work!

WHAT WILL WIN? SIMPLE ANSWER: THE IDEA!

Most entries will be the most obvious. The judges take valuable time to read the entries so aim to stand out! Be unconventional and original and whisk the judges off their feet with your sparkling insight. Generally an

excellent idea will win out over perfect writing skills – but you have to ensure that your unique idea isn't so weird that it alienates the reader. Aim to entertain – not to baffle or to sound clever. Judges want to be entertained. They usually publish your winning entry, so they will want to appeal to a large audience so bear that in mind when formulating your idea. How do you get ideas? There is no simple answer, but there are many strategies that might help you:

MINDMAPPING POSSIBILITIES: Write the topic/theme in the centre of a blank piece of paper and draw lines outwards, towards the edge of the paper, then let your creativity go wild! Give each line a different function – depending on the topic, to get you started, these might be helpful – obviously it depends what themes you are thinking about:

- ✓ Senses: sights, smells, touch, sounds and tastes
- ✓ Living things: people, animals, aliens etc.
- ✓ Feelings – laughter, anger, fear, regret etc.
- ✓ Built environment: houses, factories, palaces, tree-house etc.

Both fiction and non-fiction themes can be inspired by simply heading down to the library or through your own book collection and flicking through books that cover the topic. Another good strategy that can work is news stories – enter the topic word into the Internet and click on NEWS and you can be amazed with what comes up.

Once you have a rough theme in your head, you are down to the planning stage. It might seem ridiculous, but a lot of story entries are anything but – a lot of entries will be just description rather than a story, this is because the entry has a lack of conflict or something to be 'solved' at the end – not like a whodunit, but something must 'happen' in a story – be it, something lost and found, a battle of some kind, a quest. Your writing should aim to ask a question of some kind and end with the answer. It will have a beginning middle and ending.

A rule of thumb for length: the beginning and ending combined should take up about 25% of the word count – and the remaining 75% should be the action. Building in some anticipation and making the reader care about what is happening. All this sounds very simple but it's amazing how many 'pro' writers fall in love with how their writing sounds to the detriment of the actual story!

The main body (The 75%) should follow a logical order. It's fine to build in a flashback, but on shorter pieces, it's easier to write a chronological account of event rather than being flashy – if the story idea is interesting, you don't need flashy literary devices – keeping it simple, original and entertaining - and you might surprise yourself!

GET WRITING! REMEMBER THE POINTS IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION REGARDING SENTENCE LENGTH ETC. GO FOR IT!

Before sending your entry, sit on it. You can take this as literal as you want, but this is the phrase that writers use to describe the period of time that they refer back to the writing so they see the work with 'fresh eyes'. The more time you can leave before re-reading your work – the easier it will be to spot mistakes because it's easy to miss things out. The things that you miss out are much easier to spot after not looking at your writing for a few days.

Finally – read it out loud to see that it 'flows' and do a spell and grammar check and you'll be done!

These competitions are not intimidating once you have broken it all up into manageable chunks. Once you are in your creative stride, it is really enjoyable to win a competition like this! If you aren't lucky – keep the writing for another comp! Good luck!

HOW TO WIN KIDS COMPS
Turn over for more types of creative competitions



KIDS COMPETITIONS

These types of competitions come in all shapes and sizes. Promoters tend to offer highly creative idea-based competitions for children – most require some level of adult supervision.

Before you get carried away with the fun and excitement– read the terms and conditions. Some promoters might want to use your entry (even if it's not the winner) for their photo stock – particularly if it features your child using their product. They become the owners of your image – and might choose to use it, royalty-free, in any promotions and that could cause distress at a later stage. As a parent, it is your decision to let this happen. If you don't want this to happen, check in the terms and conditions to see exactly what they will do with your hard work.

BABIES/TODDLERS

Photography is the main type of competition for this age group. Take time to read through the photography guide section because the judges will have to sieve through a vast amount of entries and a quality picture might give you the edge.

Blurriness is common with these types of photos because babies and toddlers are active – so take lots of shots so that you have a lot to choose from! If you want a smiley face – putting something weird on your head to produce a laugh will also minimise a red-eye effect, as it will prevent your little one looking directly into the camera.

Promoters have a lot of shots featured in domestic environments, so you might want to tidy up before taking pictures – your underwear hanging on the radiator may be true to life, but not necessarily something you'd like to advertise in front of the general public!

Dress-up and keep it clean – a snotty nose and a chocolate covered face with a bib that has seen better days may seem adorable to you, but your photo has the potential to be judged by a faceless crowd of parents not your family members!

If other children feature in your photo (maybe the photo was taken in a colourful soft play centre or at a social/public event) ensure you get permission from the other parents to use the photo.

PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

It is common for this age group to be asked to create something – a piece of art or a design for a poster or product. Remember, children like to rush into things, so choose a good time for your child to tell them about the competition – when they have enough time and resources at their disposal to get started straight away.

Discussing ideas with them can be a double-edged sword. Our tip is not to discuss the ideas, but leave it up to the kids! You can to get a few avenues for them by devising an 'INSPIRATION STATION' (shoebox) full of examples that they can look through, previous winning entries and places where they can seek more information themselves works well for over 7's.

What you DO need to drill into them are CLEAR SIMPLE INSTRUCTIONS relayed to the terms and conditions. That way, you are giving them as much freedom as they need – and make sure you are available for questions. Resist doing it for them – the child will get no enjoyment from that, and high parent input is transparent to promoters. Think how proud your child will feel to know they did it all by themselves! Trust them – give them the power to choose with minimal direction from 'boring grown-ups'!

A lot of these competitions allow the child to win something for their school – if this is the case, you'll most likely have to contact the school. TO AVOID DISAPPOINTMENT: Ensure you read the terms and conditions and make sure everything is in place with the correct school department before you start.

SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

Less parental supervision is required here, but the emphasis is still on reading the terms and conditions, and having everything they need at their disposal. Teenagers benefit from having previous winning examples and info at their fingertips. They are more inclined to research independently, but anything you can do to reduce the time spent on this, will not be in vain.

Teenagers are used to creativity within a social media context, they will probably have a much better idea about what will win than you will! Even so, if the competition is linked to winning resources for your school, you might have to fill out a couple of forms to be sent with the entry.

Deadline dates. Need we say more? Teenagers have so much homework to do, but they will benefit from suggestions about time management – maybe go through their schedule with them to help them identify spare time.

Most of all – have fun! Childhood, for some, is the most creative period of their lives – they will love you to be involved with their schemes and you'll have plenty of fond memories (and hopefully prizes too!) to look back on.

HOW TO WIN OTHER KINDS OF COMPS

Turn over for more types of creative competitions



OTHER CREATIVE COMPETITIONS

As you will have read through the guide – most creative and skill-based competitions are really easy if you take a few minutes to prepare. The winning criteria are based on creativity and the idea rather than on any rare ability.

Design competitions feature heavily in the ‘other’ category. These also, do not need skills that would make architect knees shake – you just need a good idea – and an open-minded approach. Singing competitions or art competitions work on the same basis – show you are having fun entering the competition!

Most of the information contained in the other sections will help you win the more obscure creative competitions – if you see a ‘create a recipe’ competitions, you could draw on photography and writing skills. Similarly, photographic composition could help you win a design a t-shirt competition. You can use the writing guide to remind you to use the note section of your phone to keep flashes of inspiration to hand. Don’t get too bogged down in seriousness and technical matters though – let your idea shine through.

Mentioning promoters is never a bad thing – also, playing upon the emotions will rarely go against you. If you can see a new angle somewhere, don’t waste it!

Not winning these competitions isn’t failure – it doesn’t mean that you are rubbish at being creative – just as not winning every prize draw doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do prize draw competitions. The odds of you winning at some point are higher because creative competitions have fewer entries – so you get higher odds of winning!

If you want to try something different, but are hesitant – zoom out for a second - a brief look through the Internet will throw up all kinds of helpful information. There is always an easy way and shortcuts. Phone applications are tailored to help ease technical problems and allow you the freedom to create harder and faster.

You can ask the community at PrizeFinder who are always willing to help, and if we don’t know, we will find out for you!

Creativity is like a muscle - the more creative you are, the more creative you will become! The more you start having ideas, the more the ideas will come! Remember:

IT AIN’T WHAT YOU WIN - IT’S THE WAY THAT YOU WIN IT!