

# Haunting Hooks Writing Contest: Official Rules

NO PURCHASE OR PAYMENT OF ANY KIND NECESSARY TO ENTER OR WIN. A PURCHASE WILL NOT INCREASE YOUR CHANCES OF WINNING. THIS CONTEST IS INTENDED FOR PLAY IN THE UNITED STATES ONLY AND WILL BE GOVERNED BY U.S. LAW. DO NOT ENTER IF YOU ARE NOT ELIGIBLE AND LOCATED IN THE UNITED STATES AT THE TIME OF ENTRY. OPEN TO LEGAL RESIDENTS OF THE 50 U.S./D.C., 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER (19 YEARS OR OLDER IN AL AND NE; 21 YEARS OR OLDER IN MS), WHO ENTER FROM WITHIN THE 50 UNITED STATES OR THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

## Eligibility

The Haunting Hooks Writing Contest (the “Contest”) is open to: legal residents of the fifty (50) United States and the District of Columbia, who are natural persons at eighteen (18) years of age or older (19 years or older in AL and NE; 21 years or older in MS), and who are located in the United States or the District of Columbia, all at the time of entry. Employees, contractors, directors, officers, and agents of Dictionary.com (“Sponsor”), its parent companies, affiliates, subsidiaries, distributors, sales representatives, and advertising, promotion and judging agencies and all other service agencies involved with the Contest, and members of the immediate family (spouse, parent, child, sibling and their respective spouses, regardless of where they reside) and household of each such employee (whether or not related) are not eligible to enter or win.

This Contest is subject to all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations and void where prohibited. Participation constitutes entrant’s full and unconditional agreement to these Official Rules and Sponsor’s decisions, which are final and binding in all matters related to the Contest. Winning a prize is contingent upon fulfilling all requirements set forth herein.

## Sponsor

Dictionary.com, 777 Mariners Island, Ste. 600, San Mateo, CA 94404, USA.

## Contest Entry Period

The Contest Entry Period begins on September 21, 2026 at 12:00:00am Pacific Time ("PT") and ends on October 12, 2026 at 11:59:59pm PT (the "Contest Entry Period"). All entries must be received before the Contest Entry Period end time/date to be valid.

## How to Enter

During the Contest Entry Period, visit the Contest's page located on Sponsor's website at <https://www.dictionary.com/articles/haunting-hooks-2026/> (and subsequent postings) and enter the Contest by providing your name, email address, and/or any other information requested by the Sponsor along with an original opening (as defined below) to a story about the invitation in 50 words or less to receive one (1) Entry into the Contest.

Only one (1) entry per person is allowed. The Sponsor will not accept multiple submissions from the same person.

"Opening" is defined as the first sentence or sentences that establish the beginning of a written narrative.

Individuals who do not follow all of the instructions, provide the required information in their registration form, and/or abide by these Official Rules or other instructions of Sponsor may be disqualified.

Contest entries must comply with all Content requirements set forth herein to be valid. As used herein, "Content" refers to all content you submit in connection with the Contest (including, but not limited to, your submission text). Sponsor reserves the right to reject any Content that does not adhere to the submission requirements, as determined in Sponsor's sole discretion, and/or disqualify the entrant. Entries must be in English. By submitting Content for the Contest, you hereby warrant and represent that your Content conforms to the Content Requirements set forth herein.

## Limit

One (1) Entry per person for the entire Contest Entry Period. "Person" is defined by one (1) email address. Each Entry must be unique.

Automated entries are prohibited, and any use of automated devices will cause disqualification. Entrants may not enter with multiple email addresses, nor may entrants use any other device or artifice to enter multiple times or as multiple entrants. Any entrant who attempts to enter with multiple email addresses, under multiple identities, or uses any device or artifice to register multiple times will be disqualified and forfeits any and all prizes won, in Sponsor's sole discretion. Multiple entrants are not permitted to share the same email address. Should multiple users of the same email enter the Contest and a dispute thereafter arise regarding the identity of the entrant, the authorized account holder of said email at the time of Entry will be considered the entrant. "Authorized Account Holder" is defined as the natural person who is assigned an email address by an internet access provider, online service provider or other organization which is responsible for assigning email addresses or the domain associated with the submitted email address. Potential winners may be required to show proof of being the Authorized Account Holder.

## Content Requirements

Entrants represent and warrant that their Content is the original work of such entrant, it has not been copied from others, it has not previously won awards, it does not violate the rights of any other person or entity, and publication of the Content via various media including web posting will not infringe on the rights of any third party. Any such entrant will indemnify and hold harmless Released Parties (defined below) from any claims to the contrary. Any entrant whose Content includes the name of third parties or contains elements not owned by the entrant must be able to provide legal releases for such use including Sponsor's use of such Content, in a form satisfactory, upon request, prior to award of prize and/or naming of entrant as a winner.

By submitting Content, you agree that your Content is gratuitous and made without restriction, and will not place Sponsor under any obligation and that Sponsor is free to use or otherwise disclose the ideas contained in the Content on a non-confidential basis to anyone or otherwise use the ideas

without any additional compensation to you. You acknowledge that, by acceptance of your Content, Sponsor does not waive any rights to use similar or related ideas or words previously known to Sponsor, or developed by its employees, or obtained from sources other than you.

BY SUBMITTING AN ENTRY, ENTRANT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THEIR ENTRY AND CONTENT MAY BE POSTED ON SPONSOR'S WEBSITE OR ELSEWHERE ON THE INTERNET AS AUTHORIZED BY SPONSOR, IN SPONSOR'S DISCRETION. Submission of Content grants Sponsor and its agents an unlimited, worldwide, perpetual license and right to publish, use, and publicly perform the Content in any way, without limitation, and without consideration to the entrant.

All Content submitted by you must conform to the additional submission requirements set forth herein:

- Content must comply with these Official Rules and any Terms of Service on the Website (if any).
- Content must be the original work of the entrant.
- Content generated or created by generative artificial intelligence or other computer programs is not eligible.
- Content cannot be sexually explicit or suggestive, unnecessarily violent or derogatory of any ethnic, racial, gender, religious, professional or age group, profane or pornographic, or reference any materially dangerous activity.
- Content cannot promote alcohol, illegal drugs, tobacco, firearms/weapons (or the use of any of the foregoing), any activities that may appear unsafe or dangerous, or any particular political agenda or message.
- Content cannot be obscene or offensive, endorse any form of hate or hate group.
- Content cannot defame, misrepresent or contain disparaging remarks about Sponsor or its products, or other people, products or companies.
- Content cannot contain trademarks or trade dress owned by others, or advertise or promote any brand or product of any kind, or contain

any personal identification, such as personal names, without permission.

- Content cannot contain copyrighted materials owned by others, including, within and outside the horror genres, titles, names, characters, or other distinctive elements within existing and/or published books, fanfiction, movies, television shows, podcasts, or other print and digital media.
- Content cannot communicate messages or images inconsistent with the positive images and/or goodwill to which Sponsor wishes to associate.
- Content cannot depict, and cannot itself, be in violation of any law.

CONTENT POSTED TO THE WEBSITE IS NOT EDITED BY SPONSOR AND IS THE VIEWS/OPINIONS OF THE INDIVIDUAL ENTRANT AND DOES NOT REFLECT THE VIEWS OF SPONSOR IN ANY MANNER. Any waiver of any obligation hereunder by Sponsor does not constitute a general waiver of any obligation to entrants. Sponsor reserves the right to waive the Contest submission requirements set forth herein in its reasonable discretion.

## Judging/Winner Notification

Judge's Choice: At the conclusion of the Entry Period, Sponsor will review all eligible Entries received during the Entry Period and review them based on and as further specified in the Contest's page. Entries must:

1. Be original.
2. Be captivating as an opening.
3. The story must be about the invitation.
4. Establish a spooky atmosphere or mood.

Submissions will be judged based on the following criteria: Creativity (50%) and Originality (50%).

Fan's Choice: At the conclusion of the Entry Period, a Jury will review all eligible Entries received during the Entry Period and select up to 15 entries to post on the Sponsor's website page.

The entry with the most votes will be the winner of the Fan's Choice award. If the winner of the Fan's Choice is the same entry that is selected by the Featured Judge, the entry with the second most votes will be awarded the Fan's Choice award. The Voting Period begins on October 16, 2026 at 12:00:00 pm Pacific Time ("PT") and ends on October 27, 2026 at 11:59:59pm PT (the "Voting Period"). All voting must be completed before the Voting Period end time/date to be valid.

On or around October 31, 2026, the potential winner(s) will be notified via email at the email address provided during entry. Potential winners are subject to verification. Winners will be required to complete, sign and return an Affidavit of Eligibility/Liability Release, and, where lawful, a Publicity Release, within four (4) calendar days of attempted notification or prize may be forfeited. If a potential winner is found not to be eligible or not in compliance with these Official Rules, if attempted notification or any prize is returned as undeliverable, if any required documents are not returned within the required number of days, if a winner cannot be verified, if the winner does not respond within the time allotted, or if a winner is otherwise unable or unwilling to accept and claim the prize as stated, then winner may be disqualified and the prize may be forfeited in Sponsor's sole discretion. Sponsor is not responsible for any change of email address, mailing address and/or telephone number of entrants.

## Prizes

One (1) verified winner of the "Judge's Choice" category will receive a \$100 Amazon gift card, a gift package of Dictionary.com or Thesaurus.com branded merchandise, and the opportunity for their Entry to be published in an editorial article on Dictionary.com and Thesaurus.com and promotions thereof over email and social media.

One (1) verified winner of the "Fan Choice" category will receive a \$50 Amazon gift card, a gift package of Dictionary.com or Thesaurus.com branded merchandise, and the opportunity for their Entry to be published in an editorial

article on Dictionary.com and Thesaurus.com and promotions thereof over email and social media.

Up to ten (10) verified winners of the “Honorable Mentions” category will receive a gift package of Dictionary.com or Thesaurus.com branded merchandise and the opportunity for their Entry to be published in an editorial article on Dictionary.com and Thesaurus.com and promotions thereof over email and social media.

## Ties/total prize values

Total retail value of all possible prizes shall not exceed \$800, excluding any taxes or shipping costs.

Sponsor makes no representation that the winner’s Entry will be used on Dictionary.com and reserves the right to use, or not use, the submission at any time.

## Limit

One (1) prize per person/household. Prizes are non-transferable and no cash equivalent or substitution of prize is offered, except at the sole discretion of the Sponsor. If a prize, or any portion thereof, cannot be awarded for any reason, Sponsor reserves the right to substitute prize with another prize of equal or greater value. Prize winners will be solely responsible for all federal, state and/or local taxes, and for any other fees or costs associated with the prizes they receive, regardless of whether it, in whole or in part, is used. Please allow 4-6 weeks for shipment of prize after confirmation. Gift cards are subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions as set by the issuer.

## Release

As a condition of entering, entrants (or their parent or legal guardian if an eligible minor) agree (and agree to confirm in writing):

1. To release Sponsor, its affiliates, subsidiaries, retailers, and agents, and each of their officers, directors, employees and agents (“Released Parties”), from any and all liability, loss or damage

- incurred with respect to the awarding, receipt, possession, and/or use or misuse of any prize or any item redeemed therewith.
2. Under no circumstances will any entrant be permitted to obtain awards for, and entrant hereby knowingly and expressly waives all rights to claim, punitive, incidental, consequential, or any other damages, other than for actual out-of-pocket expenses and/or any rights to have damages multiplied or otherwise increased.
  3. All causes of action arising out of or connected with this Contest, or any prize awarded, shall be resolved individually, without resort to any form of class action.
  4. Any and all claims, judgments, and awards shall be limited to actual out-of-pocket costs incurred (if any), excluding attorneys' fees and court costs.

## Ownership & License

Providing Content grants Sponsor and its agents the right to publish, use, adapt, edit and/or modify such Content in any way, in any and all media, without limitation, and without consideration to the entrant. By accepting a prize, winner agrees that their Content will be deemed a Work Made For Hire under the Copyright laws of the United States, but if it cannot be so deemed, then the winner irrevocably assigns and transfers to Sponsor all of their right, title and interest in and to their Content, including all but not limited to all copyright and trademark rights which they may have, in the United States and worldwide, therein, for consideration, the receipt and sufficiency of which is hereby acknowledged. Winner hereby waives in favor of Sponsor, all rights of "Droit Moral" or "Moral Rights of Authors" or any similar rights or principles of law that winner may now or later have to their Content. Sponsor reserves the right to alter, change or modify the winning Content, in its sole discretion. Upon request of Sponsor, winner shall execute and deliver such additional instrument of assignment, as may be solely deemed by Sponsor, reasonably necessary to establish the ownership of record of the right, title and interest in and to the Content and of the copyrights transferred and "Moral Rights of Authors" waived under these Official Rules. Should Sponsor fail to request the said assignment as stated, that shall not be deemed a waiver of Sponsor's rights and Sponsor may at a later time request the assignment.

# Publicity

Except where prohibited by law, each winner grants (and agrees to confirm this grant in writing, if requested) permission for Sponsor and those acting under its authority to use their name, photograph, likeness, and/or Description for advertising and/or publicity purposes in any and all media now known or hereinafter invented without territorial or time limitations and without compensation.

## General Conditions

Sponsor is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected, undelivered, incorrect, or inaccurate entry information whether caused by internet users or by any of the equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the Contest or by any technical or human error which may occur in the processing of the entries. Sponsor reserves the right to cancel, suspend and/or modify the Contest, or any part of it, if any fraud, bugs, virus, technical failures, or any other factor beyond Sponsor's reasonable control impairs the integrity or proper functioning of the Contest, as determined by Sponsor in its sole discretion.

In the event of cancellation, Sponsor will award the prizes from among all eligible, non-suspect entries received prior to cancellation in a manner deemed fair and equitable.

Sponsor is not responsible for computer system, phone line, hardware, software or program malfunctions, or other errors, failures or delays in computer transmissions, the website, or network connections that are human or technical in nature. Sponsor reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to disqualify any individual it finds to be tampering with the entry process, the website, or the operation of the Contest or to be acting in violation of the Official Rules of this or any other promotion or in an unsportsmanlike or disruptive manner. Any attempt by any person to deliberately undermine the legitimate operation of the Contest may be a violation of criminal and civil law, and, should such an attempt be made, Sponsor reserves the right to seek damages from any such person to the fullest extent permitted by law. Sponsor's failure to enforce any term of these Official Rules shall not constitute a waiver of that provision.

# Binding Arbitration

Any controversy or claim arising out of or relating to this Contest shall be settled by binding arbitration in a location determined by the arbitrator as set forth herein (provided that such location is reasonably convenient for claimant), or at such other location as may be mutually agreed upon by the parties, in accordance with the procedural rules for commercial disputes set forth in the Comprehensive Arbitration Rules and Procedures of JAMS (“JAMS Rules and Procedures”) then prevailing, and judgment upon the award rendered by the arbitrator(s) may be entered in any court having jurisdiction thereof.

The arbitrator shall be selected pursuant to the JAMS Rules and Procedures. The arbitrator shall apply California law consistent with the Federal Arbitration Act and applicable statutes of limitations, and shall honor claims of privilege recognized at law. In the event that the claimant is able to demonstrate that the costs of arbitration will be prohibitive as compared to the costs of litigation, Sponsor will pay as much of the claimant’s filing and hearing fees in connection with the arbitration as the arbitrator deems necessary to prevent the arbitration from being cost-prohibitive. If any part of this arbitration provision is deemed to be invalid, unenforceable or illegal (other than that claims will not be arbitrated on a class or representative basis), or otherwise conflicts with the rules and procedures established by JAMS, then the balance of this arbitration provision shall remain in effect and shall be construed in accordance with its terms as if the invalid, unenforceable, illegal or conflicting provision were not contained herein. If, however, the portion that is deemed invalid, unenforceable or illegal is that claims will not be arbitrated on a class or representative basis, then the entirety of this arbitration provision shall be null and void, and neither claimant nor Sponsor shall be entitled to arbitrate their dispute. Upon filing a demand for arbitration, all parties to such arbitration shall have the right of discovery, which discovery shall be completed within sixty days after the demand for arbitration is made, unless further extended by mutual agreement of the parties.

THE ARBITRATION OF DISPUTES PURSUANT TO THIS PARAGRAPH SHALL BE IN THE ENTRANT’S INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY AND NOT AS A

PLAINTIFF OR CLASS MEMBER IN ANY PURPORTED CLASS OR REPRESENTATIVE PROCEEDING. THE ARBITRATOR MAY NOT CONSOLIDATE OR JOIN THE CLAIMS OF OTHER PERSONS OR PARTIES WHO MAY BE SIMILARLY SITUATED. DO NOT ENTER THIS CONTEST IF YOU DO NOT AGREE TO HAVE ANY CLAIM OR CONTROVERSY ARBITRATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THESE OFFICIAL RULES.

BY PARTICIPATING IN THE CONTEST, EACH ENTRANT AGREES THAT TO THE EXTENT PERMITTED BY APPLICABLE LAW: (1) ANY AND ALL DISPUTES, CLAIMS AND CAUSES OF ACTION ARISING OUT OF OR CONNECTED WITH THE CONTEST, OR ANY PRIZE AWARDED, WILL BE RESOLVED INDIVIDUALLY THROUGH BINDING ARBITRATION AS SET FORTH ABOVE, WITHOUT RESORT TO ANY FORM OF CLASS ACTION AND (2) ENTRANT'S REMEDIES ARE LIMITED TO A CLAIM FOR MONEY DAMAGES (IF ANY) AND ENTRANT IRREVOCABLY WAIVES ANY RIGHT TO SEEK INJUNCTIVE OR EQUITABLE RELIEF. SOME JURISDICTIONS DO NOT ALLOW THE LIMITATIONS OR EXCLUSION OF LIABILITY SET FORTH ABOVE AND IN SECTION 7(B)-(D), SO SUCH LANGUAGE MAY NOT APPLY TO EVERY ENTRANT.

## Governing Law & Jurisdiction

This Contest and its Official Rules are governed by US law and are subject to all applicable federal, state and local laws and regulations. All issues and questions concerning the construction, validity, interpretation and enforceability of the Contest Official Rules, or the rights and obligations of entrants and Sponsor in connection with the Contest, shall be governed by, and construed in accordance with, the laws of the State of California, U.S.A., without giving effect to the conflict of laws rules thereof, and any matters or proceedings which are not subject to arbitration as set forth in Section 12 of these Official Rules and/or for entering any judgment on an arbitration award, shall take place in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California.

## Entrant's Personal Information

Please see the privacy policy located at <https://www.dictionary.com/e/terms/> for details of Sponsor's policy regarding the use of personal information collected in connection with this Contest. If you are selected as a finalist, your information may be included in the finalists' list. If you are selected as a winner, your information may also be included in a publicly available winner's list.

## Winner List

For a list of winners, mail a self-addressed, stamped envelope to: 777 Mariners Island, Ste. 600, San Mateo, CA 94404, USA. Requests must be received by November 30, 2026.