

How to win the Booker Prize



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By Leo McFaul

In 1969, author PH Newby swept in and won the very first Booker Prize with his novel [Something to Answer For](#), igniting the 53-year-long reputation behind the literary award.

Every year, a five-person panel awards the Booker prize to one novelist, guaranteeing them a sum of prize money currently amassing £50,000. However, the symbolic capital that the Booker represents can often surpass economic worth, as the prestigious award is associated with international publicity and an extreme increase in sales known as the 'Booker bounce'. For example, [Shuggie Bain](#) by Douglas Stuart sold more than 25,000 copies in the UK following the announcement that it had won the Booker in 2020 - a 1900% increase in sales. It reached Number 1 in *The Times* bestseller list and was chosen as the 'Book of the Year' by *The Daily Telegraph* and the 2021 *British Book Awards*. As French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu puts it, the award refers "to a logic of exchange in which value is measured in terms of prestige, cachet, recognition, and respect".

However, despite being such an honourable and ubiquitous part of literary culture, the award has been known to thrive on controversy, scandal and gossip, with constant drama amongst critics and shortlisted authors. With publishers reluctant to pay entry fees or John Berger donating his prize money against “Booker McConnell’s involvement in colonial exploitation”, the Booker has had its fair deal of good and bad publicity.

Some have claimed the criteria of “the best original full-length novel written in the English language” is too vague and generic, as it is hard to define ‘best’ or ‘full-length’. It is even questionable what type of novel they are asking for - could it be a mix of fiction and fact? Could it be written in verse? However,



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this criterion has been

consistent from the inauguration of the award, as it was inspired by the Prix Goncourt. This literary prize is located in France, and also provides vague criteria of “the best prose work of the year.”

However, if you are planning to win the Booker Prize, that is not the only criteria your novel has to fit. The text has to be written in English and published in the UK. However, authors from a myriad of different backgrounds have been awarded the prize, from 80-year-old Margaret Atwood from Canada to New Zealand novelist Eleanor Catton at just 28 years old. The one thing they all

have in common is a passion for writing - but are there any other trends that seem to have particularly caught the judge's attention?

By looking at the data of all the winners, we see that the most common publisher by far is Jonathan Cape, and 65.9% of winners have been male, with an average age of 50 years old. Whilst this might mean that being male makes you statistically more likely to win, within the last ten years, nearly half of the winners have been female, and the award seems more focused on diversity in current years, especially considering that the 2022 lineup represents five different nationalities.

You may also want to gain a respectable education, as nearly half of all winners attended private school, with 11 going to the University of Oxford. Or perhaps you are more focused on creating the perfect Booker book, where historically shorter texts (under 400 pages) with 3-word titles have won more frequently.

Regardless, the Booker has still reached its desired impact - to promote and make an occasion of reading.

Click [here](#) to view the full informational spreadsheet of Booker Prize winners.