



The Freedom
to Write

About the PEN Prison Writing Program

*Founded in 1971, **the PEN Prison Writing Program** believes in the restorative, rehabilitative and transformative possibilities of writing. We provide hundreds of imprisoned writers across the country with free writing resources, skilled mentors, and audiences for their work. Our program supports free expression, and encourages the use of the written word as a legitimate form of power. We strive towards an increasingly integrative approach, aiming to amplify the voices and writing of imprisoned people to expand beyond the silo of prison, and identity of prisoner.*

Our offerings include:

1. The Handbook for Writers in Prison. This handbook teaches elements of writing fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. It also provides resources for writers in prison. The handbook is free for any incarcerated person who writes us a letter requesting one. To request one, send a note to:

PEN Prison Writing Program
588 Broadway, Suite 303
New York, NY 10012

2. Our annual Prison Writing Program awards contest. PEN awards cash prizes in five categories of writing from prisoners (fiction, essay, memoir, poetry, and drama/screenplay). We receive approximately 1500 entries a year; the contest ends September 1st. We encourage individuals of all writing levels to enter the contest. To enter, simply mail the entry to:

PEN Writing Awards for Prisoners
588 Broadway, Suite 303
New York, NY 10012

No application or form is necessary, though most participants do send us a short cover letter.

3. Our Mentorship Program. The PEN Prison Writing Mentorship Program pairs established writers with incarcerated men and women. To become eligible for the program, one must first enter the annual contest. Winners are offered the first opportunity to work with a mentor. We try our best to then extend this opportunity to writers who did not win an award, but whose efforts were recognized by the judges. If you are selected for a mentorship, you will receive a letter of notification at the appropriate time.