General Critique Group Guidelines

The purpose and goal of a critique group is to get feedback from fellow writers to help improve your writing craft and/or manuscript. Analyzing the work of other writers also helps you develop better editing skills; seeing their mistakes will better help you see yours.

Responsibility of the person giving the critique…

1. Start off with something positive.
2. Be professional and focus on the writing – not the writer. Better yet, focus on the story and not just the words.
3. Do not try to make someone else’s story into something you’d write.
4. Do not rewrite the story – unless it’s yours.
5. Give suggestions and not just criticisms; make notes on the manuscript through tracking software.
6. Be humble. Be respectful.

Responsibility of the person receiving the critique…

1. Email your submission on time.
2. Make sure your submission is free of as many typos/grammar errors as possible.
3. Do not take the criticism personally. Remember the goal is to improve your writing and/or manuscript.
4. Ask questions to get clarification on comments, but do not argue, justify or defend.
5. Take time to consider all the comments, decide which apply to your work, then move forward with your revisions.
6. Be proud. Giving your pages to others to critique takes guts. Own that.

**Feedback tips for Critiquing:**

1. Be warm and supportive. Your job is to critique the writing to help the author take their work to the next draft.
2. Read with an open mind and heart. Be generous. **Praise what you can praise. Tell the writers what you like and why you like it.**
3. Offer suggestions on how they can improve their writing in their next draft.

Some things that would be useful for them to know are:

1. Where you are confused.
2. What you would like to know more.
3. Where a scene would be more effective than a summary.
4. Where it could use dialogue.
5. Where the dialogue doesn’t work.

Suggested Structural Guidelines

* Recommended size for critique groups is 6-8 members.
* Most critique groups meet once a month (some meet once a week or every other week) and have a specific focus, such as novel, memoir, poetry, etc.
* Recommended submission process is to send your work by email to all group members by the deadline. Submissions must be in Word, double spaced using Times New Roman 12-point font. If editing by hand, line numbers are helpful. The author’s name must be on the submission and the pages numbered. Maximum number of words for book authors is the group’s decision. Suggest 2000 to 3500. Poetry and other types of critique groups should decide on the parameters they prefer to use.
* Suggested file name format: N-6-AuthorLastName.doc The first letter identifies the type of critique group (N for Novel, M for Memoir, etc). The number denotes the month it was submitted, in this case it would be June. In returning the critique to the author, add a dash and your own last name (N-6-AuthorLastName-ReaderLastName. However you name them, you should include the author’s name and meeting date. Returned markups should contain the critiquer’s name.

**Word editing process**

* Download and open the Word document.
* Click on “Review”. Turn on “Track Changes”. This will keep track of edits and corrections.
* Click on “New Comment” to make comments, which will appear on the right side. Add comments to clarify points of feedback and to ask questions.
* If manually editing, use proofreading marks (with red or colored pen).

**Recommended timing for monthly groups:**

* First Thursday – send your submission to each person in the group (or a reasonable time before the meeting agreed on by your group.)
* Third Sunday – deadline to return critiques to the author. (Some groups don’t return critiques before the meeting but bring them and review them with the author at the meeting.)
* Third Thursday (or an agreed upon time and date) – the meeting is held at an agreed upon time and place (or Zoom). Each person has 20 minutes to ask questions about the critiques they received and/or they can ask general questions related to their writing process. (Alternately, if you bring your critique to the meeting, 5 minutes for each critique. Author can speak to ask or answer questions after all critiques of their work.