

Critiques: HOW TO DISH 'EM OUT and TAKE 'EM TOO!

Presented by Carol O'Dell
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"I always do the first line well, but I have trouble with the others." Moliere

Critiques—Why They're So Important

- They make us deliver
- We're not able to see our own idiosyncrasies
- Creates a valuable social network
- You BECOME a better writer by reading and critiquing

Famous Writing Groups

The Inklings: Met at the Eagle and Child

GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE EXPATRIATES OF PARIS

Famous Writers Who Praise Their Writing Groups

- AMY TAN--after her psychiatrist fell asleep for the third time during one of their sessions, Tan quit therapy and took up fiction writing instead.
- Sci Fi Author Karen Joy Fowler
- Toni Morrison
- Local Author Laurell K. Hamilton

Your Writing Network

- Writing partners
- Workshops
- Conferences
- Online critiques
- Freelance editors
- Classes and professors
- Agent
- Publisher and Editor

I was working on the proof of one of my poems all the morning, and took out a comma. In the afternoon I put it back again." Oscar Wilde

Dynamics of an Ideal Group

- Committed
- Enthusiastic
- Engaged
- Encouraging
- Truthful
- Detailed
- Articulate
- Respectful

Why Does a Critique Group Need a Moderator?

- Flow
- Timing of each read
- To keep the group on the ideal track
- Moderate disputes

Three Models of Successful Groups

- Writer does not speak—at all.
- Writer may ask questions—at the end.
- Writer interacts with the group throughout the process.

Dish ‘Em Out—How to GIVE a Critique

- Sandwich your critique—good, helpful, good.
- Be detailed about how to improve
- Critique the work, not the author
- Speak in general to the group
- Offer suggestions, but avoid the temptation to rewrite the story
- Offer marketing possibilities
- Ask questions that will lead the writer to address key issues
- Refrain from hogging the floor
- Give every member the chance to speak
- Write on the manuscript, but make it legible

- An overview sheet or “letter to the author” is extremely helpful
- Give every manuscript the same respect and attention—don’t play favorites

"Suspect all your favorite sentences." Kenneth Atchity

How to Take It—How to RECEIVE

- Listen, pay attention, take notes
- Avoid defensive looks, gesture, thoughts
- Bring your best work—state on the ms. how far along you believe it is and what help you’re looking for
- Separate yourself from the work—both mentally and time-wise
- Be grateful for ALL feedback—the ones that frustrate you the most may well be the most helpful
- DO give the critique some “rest” time before working on your manuscript
- Use your notes and critiques to make your work even better
- Say thank you and be pleasant

The Nitty Gritty—When Things Go Amuck

- Someone says something hurtful
- Someone gets mad
- Someone plays favorites
- A manuscript is in poor taste
- Someone is offended by the content
- The manuscript is not ready to be critiqued but has been submitted
- Someone is not attending/doing the work
- Someone is hogging the floor
- Someone is observing but not participating
- Someone is gossiping, causing discord
- You’ve really thought about it and you still disagree

The Bottom Line

- Be truthful yet tactful
- Have a positive attitude
- Be professional
- Keep it about the work
- Get mad, hurt, frustrated—at home
- Get over it
- Enjoy the journey
- Embrace the chaos
- Don’t let ANYTHING stop you