

Part I: Critique Groups: Offering More Detailed Feedback

Part II: Writers' Critique Groups: *What are they and how do they work?*

Critique Groups

Offering More Detailed Feedback

Ongoing Critique Groups

These consist of 3-8 writers who regularly meet to offer constructive feedback and encouragement. The aims of the participants can vary: aspire to be a published author, learn more about the craft of writing, find their voice, and see how their writing goals evolve. Such groups provide opportunities to enhance skills, creativity, confidence, and to share approaches and resources for each writer's journey. Participants may also be inspired to generate new work and revisit/revise pieces that have been left unattended for a while.

For critique groups to function well, their members must experience them as 'psychologically safe,' where writers can share their feelings of vulnerability, self-doubt, and insecurity, and where they can also be uplifting and foster friendships. You want to be with others who respect your ability and efforts to enhance your skills and writing experience.

Critiquing the work of others augments your ability to clarify what is effective for your aims and what revisions might benefit your own work. While learning from others, you may experiment and feel supported as you grow at your own pace. These groups vary in several ways, such as genre, writing aims, and participants' levels of experience.

Finding, Running and Forming a Critique Group

Join our roster of members interested in participating in a critique group that matches your preferences. We can introduce you to a current critique group or to other members with similar interests, so a new group can be formed.

The decision to join or be accepted into a group is left to each CWC member who makes the request and to the group's current participants. Critique groups are regarded as autonomous and not operated by or under the authority of our CWC branch. They may include non-CWC members, but only CWC members can use our support services.

After you finish reviewing this sheet, simply return to the previous screen—the main Critique Group page. Scroll down to access the application form. You can enter your name and preferences in that section of this page.

We are also eager to obtain information about existing critique groups. So, if you are currently participating in one or know of one that would like new participants now or later, please inform the CWC branch Facilitator or fill out the same form with that information.

Questions & more info: Contact the Critique Groups Facilitator at critiquegroups@cwcmtdiablo.org.

Sign up for a critique Group and tell us your preferences

To access the application form, return to the Critique Group main page and scroll down. You can quickly type in your preferences, such as genres, days, times, and locations. Do you want to meet in person, online, or is a mix acceptable? Your input feeds our roster, enabling us to better and more easily serve your needs. Please feel free to return to the application form to update your preferences.

Writer Critique Groups

What are they and how do they work?

The Purpose of a Critique Group.

Support in a substantive way to enhance the writing skills and creativity of its members. It may be easier to be a critic than a creator but practicing both fosters both. To promote a rewarding experience for participants, we offer some guidelines below. These provide an efficient means for a shared understanding and expectations for the group process and feedback etiquette.

Logistics and process.

Critique group members should advisably come to a consensus in advance regarding:

- the frequency of meetings (e.g., alternative weeks or monthly)
- the length of meetings (e.g., often 90 minutes)
- their location (e.g., a reserved room at a library or homes of members)
- the processes for submitting writing for review and feedback
- the group's experience may warrant changes.

Composition

- Critique groups can consist of members who seek a group for a particular genre, a couple of genres or a broader mix. There are advantages to each of these.
- The range of writing experience and skills often varies in a group; this has some advantages for all.
- The number of members in critique groups usually ranges from 5 to 8.

What kind or stage of writing is to be submitted for feedback

- Groups vary in the range of writing for their submissions for feedback. Some permit first drafts, others prefer a more polished piece. Still others accept either. Allowing early drafts fosters a supportive environment for beginning writers and earlier versions of possible works.

Who submits their writing for feedback

- Many groups use a simple rotation approach per meeting for selecting two or three its members to submit without pressure. Others rely on or allow volunteering.
- The number of submissions per meeting will depend on the group's decision about how much time is desired for feedback for each piece.

- Guidelines are recommended for length of a submission such as the number of words, or pages of double-space text.

How to submit and present your piece

- Many groups have submissions emailed to members a week or so in advance of a meeting when it is to be reviewed. This enables opportunities for a better digestion of the piece and consideration of the feedback members may want to offer. These emails can usefully include a brief description of context (e.g., chapter 1 of a murder mystery novella) and can also specify a particular aspect of feedback desired in the in-person review.
- Some groups also have the submitter read out loud, all or part of their piece, at the meeting for review. This practice aids in the enjoyment, appreciation, comprehension and revelation of some features of the writing that may not be as easily accessible by silent reading.

Feedback logistics

- In a simple sequence or otherwise, each member should have an equal opportunity to offer feedback and suggestions.
- The group should decide in advance how much time is allowed for each member's feedback.
- Advisably, the group appoints a timekeeper to keep the process on track.
- The submitter may ask for clarification of a comment but is otherwise encouraged to be silent during the critique.
- After the round of feedback, the author can ask and discuss some of the points. This phase should also be brief, abiding by the time allowed.
- Based on the experience of the group, adjustments to various aspects of the process may be modified.

Scope and kind of feedback

- The feedback offered should be respectful of the writer and rendered in constructive terms that address the piece overall or its major aspects, and any area requested by the submitter.
- Unless clearly requested by the author, do not present or offer a rewrite.

- Some groups encourage adopting a critique template that identifies widely recognized features of skillful writing. Such a template can be used in various ways as decided by the group. More advice and an example of such a template can be found below.
- Not warranted in the feedback session is a sentence-by-sentence revision of punctuation or word changes. So-called “micro-editing” suggestions, which can undeniably be helpful, are best offered to the submitter via emailing or with a hardcopy after the in-person feedback meeting is completed.

Receiving Criticism

- There is no absolute census as to what constitutes perfection, especially given the broad diversity of reasons for writing and its readers.
- Please do not take the criticism personally.
- What you do with the feedback is your call but strive to be open-minded and allow yourself to consider the range of comments.

Study group critique session

- A variant for a ‘regular’ critique group session is for members to decide to have a meeting, every so often, that focuses on a topic, skill, approach, technique or other aspect of writing.
- Examples: “Let’s agree to read a piece by well-respected author of our choosing and analyze how they so skillfully come up with surprise endings.” “Let’s have a session on approaches to shifting POVs, including interiority, in the story. We can bring in some examples to learn better how to do it without losing the reader.” “Let’s do some homework on openings, the story doesn’t have to be the same: One of us can do a soft entry; another one can craft a scenic sensory setting. Who would like to offer a tense scenario. Someone else could provide some larger context to engage us in whatever the story is. And someone else can focus on the character. Maybe this fun exercise can aid in expanding our skill set for options to starting Act I.”

Use of a Critique Template

- Minimally, it can serve as a consultation resource for submitters and reviewers, but feedback should not be confined by it.
- To avoid alienating members and discouraging participation, the use of such a template should not be treated as a report card or rigid checklist.
- Preferably, it will serve as a useful mindful tool for improving writing skills, for revising and for aiding with the clarity of feedback.