

Critique Guidelines

It is helpful to state that your manuscript is or isn't in first draft, and what kind of book or story it is. Listen respectfully to all criticism offered and take notes. Realize that each comment is an opinion and it's up to you to evaluate its worth to you. Realize also that some comments that seem valueless now may later appear more worthy. Time is a great digestive factor. Be aware of visible reactions to your writing: interest, boredom, excitement, incredulity, emotional involvement. By the end, have a feeling for whether your manuscript is appropriate for its intended audience. What are its strengths, weaknesses? Is it satisfying? Did you hear specific suggestions for improvement?

You, as the critiquer -

ALWAYS begin with a positive comment. Offer all criticism tentatively, as your opinion. Be specific. Avoid telling how you would handle a writing problem. It's up to the writer to do the fixing. Keep comments relevant to the manuscript being discussed. State your comment once only. If the writer needs elaboration, he or she will ask for it.

Guidelines for Successful Critique

1. Critiques are a two-way street. You should participate both by bringing something to share, and providing feedback for those who have also brought something to share.
2. When offering feedback, think what would be most useful to you. For example, "I

liked it, it was good." tells the author nothing, but "The dialog on page 4 is really interesting, it gives a good sense of the character, you should use that same type of dialog on page 7." gives the author a place to start.

3. Don't try to rewrite someone's manuscript for them. Respect their story, but offer comments about characterization, dialog, setting, sensory images, descriptions, what works for you as the reader, and what didn't work. Be specific and try to identify the "why's", such as "I didn't find the description of the six-foot rabbit to be believable. His character comes across as a much shorter rabbit to me." Silly, but you get the idea.

4. If it's your piece that's being critiqued, don't preface your reading by explaining what's going to happen, or apologizing for your work. You wrote it, you want feed back, that's why you're here. If something isn't clear to those who are reading your story, don't try to explain it. If they didn't get it by reading, you need to rework that part.

5. Remember, you don't have to agree with everything that is being said. Take the information that makes the most sense to you, discard the rest. And don't take things personally. It's not "you" that's being critiqued, it's a sample of something you've written.

6. Respect your group. Don't bring 50 pages and expect to work through them all that night. We are going to set the limit of 10 pages or one chapter. Please adhere to this.

7. Have fun! This is a great process, and despite the many frustrations in the business of writing for children, critique groups are often the best part of it for any writer. Trust your group to be helpful and supportive.