

The Writers Cafe - East and West

Open to the public and free.

EAST: Second Thursday at Palmer Library, 7-9 pm.

WEST: Third Sunday at Wanamakers General Store, Kempton, PA 1-3 pm.

It is impossible for most people to critique their own work. Realizing that the critiquing process can seem very threatening, here are some guidelines:

Guidelines for Critiquers at The Writers Cafe:

Critiquing is important, critiquing is work! Listen actively and jot down notes as impressions hit you. Note the good stuff as well as the not so good. Be specific

Critique is about the **WORK** the person just read. Each read and critique is time limited, so keep comments succinct, focused and relevant. Do not engage in cross discussions or sidebar conversations with others during a critique time. Save that for afterwards.

Find something positive to say about the manuscript before making suggestions for change.

Do *not* debate the author's world. If the premise is that a civilization of intelligent mercury blobs live under Jupiter's Great Red Spot, then by golly, there is a civilization of intelligent mercury blobs living under Jupiter's Great Red Spot, and everything flows from there. However, pointing out internal inconsistency is good and helpful.

See checklist below for some ideas of what to look for while listening. Remember, you won't help the writer by a casual comment that "it's wonderful."

As much as possible we will give fair time to all who have manuscripts to read.

Be sure you understand what the author wants from the session. If he/she is seeking publication, try to suggest possible markets. Some writers aren't ready to submit to the publishing world. Some don't want to. That doesn't make their work any less worthy of our best evaluation.

Strive to always be honest encouragers.

Guidelines for the person being critiqued at The Writers Cafe

Before reading your work, tell the group what it is you want from the critique. You *may* bring copies of your manuscript, 2 pages, double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font. This is not required, though It is sometimes easier for others to spot problem areas when they can see as well as hear it being read. Some will prefer to hear the work in your own voice.

Reading your manuscript aloud is an effective way of picking up on problem areas. If you stumble over a passage, so will the reader.

Be open to new thoughts and ideas. LISTEN. *Do not debate or argue or defend your work while it is being critiqued.*

Develop an armadillo hide.

You only learn by listening to others and taking what they say to heart. Feel free to ask questions for clarification.

Many suggestions will be excellent, but not all may be right for you. Remember, this is YOUR work, and you are responsible for deciding which ideas to embrace or disregard.

Be a good steward of everyone's time by working diligently on your manuscript to make it shine.

A checklist: Things to note while listening to a reading.

- Are the verbs active? Are the nouns specific?
- Does the dialogue sound natural?
- Is the dialog consistent with the speaker and the situation?
- Do the characters seem real? Are they behaving rationally? Do you care what happens to them?
- Is the work focused? Is there a theme? Is the author's point coming through clearly?
- Does the material flow smoothly? Is it well organized?
- Does it suit the age of the potential reader?
- Is the nonfiction illustrated with anecdotes?
- Does the fiction plot seem logical?
- Are the paragraph and sentence lengths too long?
- Is the meaning clear and the writing concise?
- Does the manuscript have value for the prospective reader:
 1. need for knowledge,
 2. explanation,
 3. comfort,
 4. humor,
 5. entertainment,
 6. inspiration, or
 7. any reason a reader may choose to spend their time reading.
- NOTE THE STRONG POINTS! Sometimes we get so caught up in what can be improved in a manuscript that we forget to notice what is good. Surely, you can find places as you read to jot "Good." "Nice description." "I like this." or "Makes me want to read more." Or an encouraging general comment, If no more than "You are working hard on this. Keep it up."