

# Critique Guidelines

From Suzanne Morgan Williams

## Starting Out

1. Find four to eight people who love to write. You don't all have to write the same kind of things, but you should probably like to read the type of work everyone does.
2. Set a time and place to meet. Don't expect everyone to make it to every meeting. If you have eight people in your group, you might expect five to six at a meeting.
3. Decide on rules. How many pages will you each read.? Will you send them to each other in advance, or read them aloud at the meeting.? Do you want members to bring printed copies of their work for everyone to read along.?

## At the Meeting

1. Choose a leader and timekeeper.
  - a. Leader – keep the discussion moving, redirect if group gets off topic, keep the conversation constructive.
  - b. Timekeeper – divide allotted time by number of writers at the table. Keep track of time – give a two minute warning. **For example:**
    - i. Allotted time is 80 minutes for 8 participants. Each gets 10 minutes. Give “times almost up” at 8 minutes, and “Moving on, please” at 10 minutes.
2. Decide how you will use each time slot – how much reading, how much discussion. If someone has enough copies for everyone in the group, do you prefer to read silently or listen and read along as the author reads aloud. Some people will *not* have enough copies and you'll need to listen to their work.

## Keep in Mind

Critique can be a harsh word. Sometimes people think it means “criticize.” **Think of this as useful feedback.** Everyone should be here to improve their craft. We have different tastes and different amounts of experience. Everyone has feelings. So:

## Sharing Your Story

1. Don't expect everyone to love everything about your work. You want to know what does and doesn't work for your audience.

2. Don't apologize – these are works in progress and everyone starts at one place and hopes to finish with a more polished and engaging story. You are here. You are brave and wonderful.
3. Listen before you respond. Take notes. People are sharing their opinions. You can decide later what you will and won't use. Sometimes this takes time to process.
4. If you have a specific concern or question about your work, share that before you read so your group can listen for that and provide feedback.

### **Listening and Providing Feedback**

1. Listen carefully. What is the age level the writer is aiming at? Keep that in mind.
2. Share something positive – every story has something – from idea to execution.
3. Then share your ideas for improvement. Sometimes you can pose this as a question and/or a statement about how *you* experienced the work:
  - a. “I'm having trouble differentiating between Nate and Jack. How do you see them as unique? What is the biggest difference between them?”
4. Be kind. Have fun.