Commitment (to group and to writing):
- Keep regular meetings even when everyone in group is starting something new and it’s too early for feedback. Use that meeting time for something else such as reviewing/discussing books, doing writing exercises, writing.

Flexible/Open to Change:
- Re-evaluate and modify established processes over time
- Adjust current processes to meet the particular needs of an individual group member at a particular time
- Recognize that writers need different types of critiques at different times (writers need to be able to recognize and articulate their needs; readers need to be able to adjust what they focus on for critique)
- Have a mind for continuous learning: End each meeting with a quick debrief to find out what worked, what didn’t work
- Intentionally evaluate group process every four to six months and adjust as needed

Effective Group Process Elements:
- Some groups value high structure
- Some groups value low structure
- Build group processes that work for you

Chemistry:
- Group members should “get” each other
- Group members should know how hard they can push individual members to help them reach their potential
- There is value to working with other writers that you like and who have personalities that you mesh with
- Surround yourself with writers you admire; writers you aim to write like

Good Cheer:
- Celebrate successes
- Support disappointments

Tolerance (for each other’s weaknesses and differences)

Trust:
- Group members should feel safe and valued
- Group members should know that other group members “have their back” and want to see them succeed/realize their writing goals
- Group members trust perspective of individuals and collective group

Respect:
- Respect one another’s writing skills
- Respect one another’s critiquing skills
- Respect one another’s ability to receive and apply feedback

Honesty (with self and with others)

Well-Rounded:
- Different members bring different strengths to the table

Qualities of Thriving Critique Groups

Examples of Critique Group Process/Structural Elements

- High Structure: Set time limit for each reader/critiquer; Feedback given in a particular way (i.e. compliment, constructive criticism, compliment); Read aloud up to “X” words, then everyone around the table shares positive feedback, then constructive feedback, then open discussion.

- Low Structure: Work through the feedback needed for each mss as needed (some groups order feedback based on first delivered, first read); Free discussion with few boundaries.

- Hold in-person meetings monthly; electronic exchanges weekly.

- Send mss to group members one week in advance of meeting. Read first without a pen in hand. Make notes on a separate piece of paper, then transfer to mss.

- Read mss at meeting, and give direct feedback at that time.

- Have someone else read your mss (or a portion of it) aloud during the meeting.

- Rotate the leader of each meeting.

- Rotate the location of each meeting.

- Include “extra’s” in each meeting agenda (i.e. personal updates/information sharing, creativity/skill exercises, book review/discussion).

**Share Information:**
- Classes and conferences (announcements and what was learned)
- Books, articles, websites
- Personal “ah-ha’s”
- Contact info
- Good news, editorial contacts, disappointments

**Get Feedback:**
- Ask Questions
- Seek input from people with different strengths and perspectives
- Hear your story read aloud by someone other than yourself

**Support/Connection:**
- Laugh! Incorporate a sense of humor into your group experience
- Play together (schedule retreats, schedule a fun outing, get to know each other as people not just writers)
- Build trust over time (incorporate team building exercises to structure this)
- Celebrate successes
- Acknowledge disappointments and challenges

**Keep Creative Juices Flowing, Get Inspired:**
- Change meeting venue
- Incorporate writing exercises into regular meetings (leader selects/facilitates)
- Build a well-rounded group (when blocked in one genre you can experiment in another area and still maintain support from group)

**Develop/Maintain Discipline and Productivity:**
- Set/share deadlines (associated with upcoming meetings/critique appointments)
- Set/share goals (short term and long term) (shared with full group or with a partner)
- Schedule mini writing sessions at coffee shops
- Schedule writing-only retreats

**Increase Skill:**
- Review and discuss good books together
- Do writing exercises as a group
- Read and work through a “writer’s workshop” book together
- Attend conferences together (divide and conquer then reconvene and share)
- Learn from each others’ skill set
- Learn by giving critiques as well as receiving critiques and listening to the critiques others give to other writers
- Learn to “read critically”

### More examples of some practices of thriving critique groups:

- Share/discuss new picture book titles during warm up time of meeting (or hold a separate “book club” type of meeting to discuss/”review” the latest books in the genre you are studying)
- Realize different people bring different skills/perspectives to the critique table (i.e. English teacher, parent, tension monitor, expertise about a particular area)
- Invite the ghosts of past members: Current group members recall the voice/expertise of past (or absent) members (i.e. Mary would have asked, “Where is the sensory detail?”)
- Share query letters/cover letters in addition to mss as part of the critique process
- Ask for the specific kind of feedback you need for your work-in-progress
- Know that different members can offer expertise in different markets (members can suggest that a particular piece is wellsuited for a particular market and/or to help a writer modify a piece so it is more suitable for a particular market i.e. Cricket vs. Highlights)
- Trust that different members have expertise in different genres (Preschool, YA and everything in between). This can serve as a catalyst for members to try out new forms
- Occasionally switch the time of day for the meeting
- Provide emotional support (encourage/lift up each other; provide an “intellectual family”)
- Enhance the critique experience with a planned activity or field trip (i.e. go in and play with preschool kids)
- Give an award for the most rejection slips accumulated in a set time period
- Rotate responsibility for leading the meeting (consider having a *task* leader and a *process* leader)
- Establish a set time for each person’s critique
- Set goals together—regularly report on progress toward goals
- Send mss ahead of critique meeting
- Bring mss to critique meeting and provide an early critique during the meeting, then give a closer read over the next week and return mss at that time.
- Refer to Francine Prose’s “Reading Like a Writer” as a guide