



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).
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Get Feedback:

- Ask Questions
- Seek Input from people with different strengths and perspectives
- Hear your story read aloud by someone other than yourself

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)

Share Information:

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

Potential Benefits of Critique Groups & Best Practices to Maximize Potential Benefits

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”

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

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 well-suited 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