

## HOW TO HAVE AN ONLINE CRITIQUE GROUP (\*ADAPTED WITH PERMISSION FROM SCBWI OREGON)

1. First agree on someone to be your group moderator
  - This person will
    - remind the group that manuscripts are due
    - be the contact on the Eastern PA SCBWI website
    - be given resources from Eastern PA SCBWI about adding new members, etc.
    - lead the group to decisions about adding new members
2. Agree on
  - How you'll critique
    - Critiquing Word documents as e-mail attachments
      - you can use the commenting option
      - you can use the Track Changes tool
    - Using a shared drive
      - you can use the commenting option
      - you can share the document with your critique partners and set the editing mode to "Suggesting" to track edits
    - Text pasted into email
      - you can type your comments in a different color, or bold or italics
  - How many pages each person may submit (maximum of 6, 8, 10 – depends on group size)
3. Agree on when
  - Manuscripts will be due to everyone each month (e.g., first Wednesday)
  - Critiques are due (one week later is reasonable)
4. Remember critique group courtesies
  - Submit and critique on a consistent basis
  - Communicate with the group leader when you will be unable to participate
  - Be timely and considerate of others' feelings – use "I" statements
  - Use standard manuscript format
    - indicate at the top of the manuscript what the manuscript is and the word count (e.g., picture book, 650 words)
  - Be prepared
    - Don't send something you just whipped out and have not spent time working on: "Most critters [critiquers] hate being used principally as proofreaders—that's your job." – Kate Reynolds
    - It's good to write a piece, and let it sit for a couple weeks. Then come back to it and read it with a fresh eye. Edit it yourself before getting others' opinions
  - Stay on task – these emails are not for casual chit-chat
5. When responding to a manuscript, plan to share
  - General comments on each manuscript using the Reply All option and typing your general thoughts into the email
    - This allows people to comment on what someone else says (e.g., critiquer 1 says – xxxx confused me and critiquer 2 says – I understood it, or critiquer 3

says – I'm concerned here about zzzz and critiquer 1 says – I agree that is a problem)

- More detailed comments to the author
  - This is where you can point out the specifics
    - instances of overuse of adverbs, or sections where you were confused who was speaking, etc.
- Basic rules of any critique apply
  - In your general comments, start with something positive – this helps the listener accept negatives easier
  - No bashing – just say what doesn't work for you and if you can, make suggestions on how to fix it
  - End with something encouraging

## The Actual Critique

### 6. Read the piece or chapter twice

- Once as a reader
  - read all the way through without stopping
  - when finished, write down your first impression – this is the basis for your group response
- The second time as an editor
  - mark things as you go
    - use simple plus and minus signs for a quick response on what you like and don't like
    - use question marks where you have a question or are confused
  - make suggestions and ask questions
  - compliment on what's well done

### 7. Don't read other critiquers' responses to a manuscript until you've written and submitted your own

### 8. Responding to others about your critique

- Don't take it personally
- Never argue, but feel free to ask for clarification
- Questions are usually to make you think, not for you to supply an answer to the critiquer
- If you disagree with what someone said, don't make the change
  - However, if several people say the same thing, you should at least consider that what you've done is not working
- Don't let others change your vision – suggestions aren't meant to be what you *must* do, but ideas on what you *could* do
- Grammar suggestions can be verified in the book Errors in English and How to Correct Them)
- Rejoice in those "aha" moments where what a critiquer says makes so much sense!
- Don't be afraid to try something new

### 9. If you have problems in a critique group, talk to your critique group leader. The Critique Group Coordinator and Regional Advisors can also be of help.