

Critique Guidelines

The main goal of the Duvall Writing Group is to learn how to give and receive valuable feedback on writing. Following are guidelines to support this goal, both for the author and the reviewer.

For the Author

1. Double-space your manuscript and add page numbers to facilitate review. Bring copies of your work for group members.
2. Before reading, identify the genre of your manuscript and describe the feedback you are looking for.
3. When reading, listen quietly without defending your work or offering long explanations for why you wrote what you did.
4. Make written notes. Note any comments that keep coming up from different people.
5. Ask questions that will help clarify speaker's comments.
6. Keep in mind that some of the issues with your work may be the speaker's.
7. When home alone with your manuscript, study the comments and decide which ones you agree with. Make revisions appropriately. You are the author.
8. Be a professional: separate yourself from your work and refuse to take anyone's comments personally.

For the Reviewer

1. Encourage and affirm; state what works in the piece before stating what doesn't.
2. Keep evaluation to manuscript only (not author, abilities, or characters). Even if the piece is autobiographical, say "the narrator," not "you."
3. Be an active listener; try to identify main points and put them into your own words. Give specific reactions to specific parts.
4. Be descriptive rather than evaluative in your responses.
5. Use "I" statements; your response is yours alone.
6. Let the writer know any questions that came to mind as you read the piece of writing.
7. If you sometimes can't give reactions, don't.
8. Write nit-picks on the manuscript rather than taking group review time. Note questions as well.
9. Suggestions for how to fix something may be valuable, but should be offered respectfully. Even if you're sure you see just how it ought to be changed, this story belongs to its author, not to you.
10. Enlarge the group discussion without repeating.

This document was drawn from guidelines by Peter Elbow, Gloria Kempton, and Ursula K. LeGuin.