

Workshopping The Rules Of Engagement

1. The goal of a workshop is to get support and helpful suggestions for rewrites. The goal is never to show off the critique giver's wit and erudition.
2. Only discuss words on the page. Do not assume the writer's intent. Do not say anything personal. Ever.
3. Always phrase a critique in a positive manner. This does not mean undue praise or being overly nice. It does mean trying to avoid phrases like "don't do." Using questions often is the most helpful way to draw attention to possible weaknesses. The phrase "x is confusing" or "I don't follow/understand x" is also a good way to point out where a writer may need to pay extra attention.
4. Look at major issues of structure and focus first. Can you follow the action? Do the characters make sense? Do you have a sense of what they want? What is the point of view? Do you think the author made the best choice here? Do you think a change of viewpoint would strengthen the story?
5. Look at issues of place and pace next. Does the story start in the right place? Is there too much backstory? Are there expository lumps? Do you always feel grounded in the place of the story? (Do you know where the characters are? Can you visualize it?) Did the author physicalize the story? Do you have a good sense of the time frame of the story? Day or night? When?
6. Finally, think about the language. Does it convey what the author wants to convey clearly? Does the dialog sound like talking? Is the language omniscient or intimate, and is it appropriate? Does the language shift in tone?

Workshopping The Mechanics

1. Someone in the group is designated “timekeeper.”
2. The person whose work is being done picks a direction.
3. Each person gives his or her critique in turn. There are no comments, no interruptions and no “crosschat.”
4. Each speaker has a five minute top limit (which may be adjusted depending on the size of the group.) Every speaker is timed. When time is called, the speaker must yield. The author takes notes during the various critiques on points that he or she feels are particularly important.
5. After each member of the group has given a critique, the author has a chance to speak. The author does not need to defend the work to the group. The author can ask for insight on a particular issue the group has not addressed, or explain why he or she made certain choices. The author has the same time limit as anyone else in the group.
6. If time permits, the group may then enter into a discussion of any issues the author has raised, or any remaining issues, in a less formal manner for up to ten minutes. At that time, all critiques are passed in to the author.
7. All critiques will be printed out or written on the copy of the work. All critiques are signed. There are no anonymous critiques.
8. Authors should take notes during critiques—what you find most useful might not be what the person giving the critique thinks is most important.

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