

Methodist's Creative Writers (MC Writers) Guidelines

1. Authors are to submit pieces to be critiqued 6 days prior to each meeting. This means that if we meet on Sunday, the deadline for submissions is Tuesday night at midnight. All pieces are to be posted on the online message board. Remember, it is the *responsibility of the sender* to make sure each group member has received his or her piece.

Note: Regarding pieces posted after the deadline: group members are not responsible for reading or critiquing pieces posted after the deadline. Critiquing a piece that was posted after the deadline is optional. If you wish to do so, feel free.

2. Chapters, essays, short stories, screenplays, plays and such submitted for critique may be **no more** than 10 pages double spaced with 1 inch margins, or **3 poems** (unless you write one really long, 3 page poem). If a member submits more than 10 pages, or more than 3 poems, reading/critiquing the additional pages is optional. Please put your name, a title, and genre on submitted pieces. Denote what your piece is (short story, 1st chapter, etc.). If your piece is longer than the 10 page length, or if you have an editor or agent waiting for your manuscript and you need the group to set aside time for specific critique, please contact the group moderator and members to see if you can 1) submit more than 10 pages or 2) make arrangements for a special critique.

Note: we do not accept pieces that classify as erotic, glorify violence or abuse, fetish writing, writing that glorifies rape, abuse to children or animals, or anything of an inappropriate sexual nature (i.e. sex with children or animals).

3. Each submission will receive an approximately 20-25 minute critique, as time allows — please try to limit your personal critique to approximately five minutes. Go over the most important aspects of your critique out loud during the meeting, but please write your entire critique on the manuscript to give to the author. Include your contact information. If the author has any questions, he or she can contact you.

During critiques, authors may choose to call on some members and not on others (so for example, if you want to use your critiquing time to get an in-depth critique from one or two members and take only written comments from the rest, feel free to do so, **though please try not to do this on a regular basis as it would exclude some member's critiques.**). Likewise, when called on for critique, a member may choose to “pass” and give the writer a only written critique (for example this option may be used if you are called on for critique but everything you'd plan to say was already covered by other critics. Thus to help conserve the author's time limit, you can opt to say, “I'll pass my time. I have nothing new to add at this point.”), but please don't use this option simply because you're shy, for example. Members are expected to participate.

Note: Unfortunately we cannot critique more than 5 submissions per meeting. If more than five pieces are submitted, the author of the very last piece (s) submitted (determined by date/time posted on the group board) will have the option to 1) go first the very next meeting or 2) allow group members to give only written critiques of the piece, turning them into the author over the next two weeks as personal time

and schedules allow. Thus when posting a piece on the group board, notice how many pieces have already been posted. If five pieces have already been posted, you may want to hold off unless it's something timely and important.

4. When time permits a member may do a short presentation (approximately 10 minutes) on something related to the business or craft of writing or lead the group in a writing exercise. A short book report, an interesting article, a hot market, a magazine that is accepting submissions, a legitimate contest, and so forth may be shared with group members. The presentation will typically be at the beginning of the meeting. Brief handouts to illustrate presentations are suggested. If you'd like to sign up to do a group presentation, please contact Evan Bridenstine.

5. As time allows, at the beginning of each session members are encouraged, briefly, to share any personal writing news they may have: Any acceptances this past month? Rejections? Any publications released containing your work? Members are also encouraged to post their writing news on our online group board as well.

6. Critique guidelines: Our primary focus is to provide feedback and suggestions for further development of each piece, chapter, poem, and so on. Please comment on where the piece works for you, where it does not, and why. **Please be specific.** Also **include your written comments on the manuscript** which will be given to the author. Because of the time limit, the focus should **not** be on critiquing grammar or syntax, unless the writer's grammar or syntax is of immediate concern; instead, please mark all grammar/syntax suggestions on the manuscript itself.

Also, the goal is to critique the piece and not the person. And please refrain from critiquing another group member's critique. There are no right or wrong answers here. This is a process, the writer may privately accept some critiques and reject others, but generally, if writers are **open to all** critiques (both negative and positive) they will find that critique, when taken as a whole, can be valuable, even if it first appears to be unhelpful. Remember: writers can learn as much from listening to critiques of other's work in addition to their own work—all **members are encouraged to attend the meetings for more than simply a critique of their own piece.** **In fact, attending meetings only when you have writing that you would like to be critiqued, and not attending when you do not have writing that you would like to be critiqued is unacceptable and may result in your being asked to leave the group.** We view our group as a writing community. The goal is to support each other as writers. Remember folks who are just "out for themselves" are disruptive to this process.

Note: Because we've had some unfortunate experiences in the past we need to remind everyone that: **No disruptions, outbursts, disrespectful comments/behavior, argumentative behavior, or passive-aggressive behavior will be allowed. Any member of the group, no matter the reason, that breaks these rules will be asked to apologize, make amends, and/or may be asked to leave the group.**

The majority of our members have been and continue to be knowledgeable, respectful, kind, and generous people. But that said, with the type of work that we do, we need to **maintain tight rules and hold each other accountable** so that we can have a safe place where writers can receive honest, in-depth critiques (critiques that requires folks to be vulnerable).

This group has three levels of membership:

A. Full member: Makes the commitment to attend all of meetings and is invested in community for the benefit of all members (meaning that you're as invested in seeing your own work in print as seeing the group's members' work in print). On the rare occasion when the full member must miss a meeting, **he or she is still responsible for sending written critiques of all pieces posted for that meeting.** Only members at this level can vote on whether or not to add new members to the group and/or vote on other important matters (such as meeting times, Christmas party, etc).

B. Honorary member: May attend up to 5 meetings per year. This member is responsible for letting the group know ahead of time when he or she will be attending and, **for that meeting only, this member is responsible for critiquing all works submitted for critique, even if he or she, for whatever reason, cannot attend the meeting.** (This level is in place for folks who may have to take a break from the group for personal or professional reasons, but for someone who fully intends to move back up to or reapply for "full member" status once the personal or professional reasons have been resolved).

C. Probationary member: Typically this will be a new member. This member will be invited to attend meetings for up to six months, and during this time he or she will be responsible for everything a full member is responsible for but without voting rights (though if you've been attending for more than a couple of months, we may ask your opinion). During the probationary six months, the probationary member will be assessed by the other group members to see if he or she would best fit with the group as a full member or an honorary member or, if the person is not a good match for the group, then not a member at all.

8. Code of conduct: critique groups are only as good or bad as their members make them. A successful group (with 3 people or 10) takes trial and error, commitment, and each member's willingness to be open to grow (hone their skills) and evolve in: reading, studying the writing craft, learning to critique, and learning to be critiqued. Remember: clashing, harsh, rigid personalities, overly needy or sensitive folk, passive-aggressive behavior, and uncommitted members are death sentences to critique groups.

Healthy critique groups are made up of committed members who listen well, treat each other with respect, are willing to learn, leave their egos at the door, genuinely love writing, and have at heart the best intentions for every member of the group. It is **VERY** important to support each member's efforts and cheer each member's successes.