

Greater St. Louis Chapter of Sisters in Crime
Guidelines for Critique Sessions

Our Aim with Critiques—

The purpose of a critique session is to share encouragement, insight, and useful suggestions. The goal is to help all of us improve our understanding of the writing process—and to improve our finished work. Specifically, a critique session can help the writer “see” his or her work as a reader might. More globally, it can teach all involved to become more adept in the writing process. The goal of a critique session is not to criticize or belittle another person’s work.

The Process—

It’s impossible to give everyone as much time as we’d like. However, our goal in creating a process is to make the time we spend as efficient as possible, as well as to be as fair as possible.

1. Bring at least 5 copies of your work.
2. Manuscript portions should be typed and double-spaced, no more than 10 pages in all.
3. One manuscript per person, please.
4. The leader will decide whether works are read out loud or silently.
5. The leader has responsibility for limiting length of time for responses to a work.

To the Author—

1. You are the final authority for your work. The purpose of a critique session is to hear suggestions that you can incorporate or ignore as you see best.
2. Writing is highly subjective. Because one person has a problem with your work does NOT mean someone else might not love it!
3. Do not argue with the person offering a critique. That’s not the purpose. However, you can answer questions if asked to expound on a certain point.

Suggestions for Critique Participants--

1. Begin your comments with praise. Find something you like and remark upon that. For example, “Your writing has a sense of energy. Your description passages are terrific!”
2. Start your concerns with the word “I.” For example, “I was unclear what you meant in this particular sentence. Could you clarify it for me?”
3. Share your experience in “I” sentences. For example, “I was told that after four sentences of dialog, it’s helpful to include a sentence linking the dialog to a particular speaker. It helps the reader keep track of who is talking.”

4. Ask questions rather than make statements. For example, “I wonder if this portion might be stronger if you used first person point-of-view?”
5. Encourage the writer. For example, “I was really drawn to your protagonist. I would love to know more about him/her.”
6. Any comments you write on a manuscript will be taken very seriously, so be careful, thoughtful and kind!
7. Balance your remarks—be sure to share what you like as well as what bothers you!
8. Feel free to line-edit, but please make your marks clear.
9. Telling an author what moved you or where you were confused is particularly helpful.
10. Please realize—it is an author’s choice whether to use or discard your comments.