

Kyle's Critique Group Guidelines

What should I bring to the critique session?

1. An open and receptive mind.

These are critique meetings, not a forum for you to present your work and receive applause. We will tell you what we like, but we will also tell you things that could be done better.

2. Six or more copies of your work.

We never know how many people will be at a session so more copies are better. If needed, you can print free copies at the Timberland Library.

3. A 1,500 – 1,800 word selection.

Shorter is fine, but longer takes time away from others. Both Microsoft Word and Scrivener have functions that will show the word count.

Tips for Receiving Criticism

1. Criticism of your work is not a criticism of you as a person.

While you may feel strongly about a first, second, or tenth draft, it likely needs improvement. The number of comments and changes will probably shrink with each revision so, don't stress over individual comments and don't take anything personally.

2. Refrain from defending your writing.

Don't explain, elaborate, or debate. No one is attacking so no defense is required. If you disagree with a comment listen, nod, smile, and say thank you.

3. You are the final authority on what goes into your manuscript.

While the ultimate decision of what goes into your manuscript is yours, don't dismiss criticism that is harsh or might be difficult to implement. Sometimes following the hardest advice can be the most worthwhile.

4. Don't just hear; try to listen and understand.

Often the most useful suggestions challenge your assumptions. While they may be difficult to implement, try to remain open-minded. The more you listen, rewrite, and see improvements in your work, the easier it will become to accept criticism in the future.

5. Use "I" statements if you need more information.

Many critique groups don't allow questions or comments from the author. We do allow questions, but try to confine them to "I" statements like, "I'm not sure what you mean," or "I'm not sure I understand. Could you elaborate on that?"

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Tips for giving criticism

1. Arrive with the right mindset.

You should be there because you want to help. If you are an experienced writer, your goal should be to help others grow to the next level. If you aren't an experienced writer, you can still help by offering what parts of the story engaged you. Comments such as, "I really got involved with the story when this happened," are very helpful.

2. Be nice and use the sandwich method.

Start with something you like, then provide constructive criticism, then end with something you else you like.

3. Use "I" statements.

It's better to say "I don't understand this part," than to make the blanket statement, "This is wrong."

4. Never criticize the writer.

We are there to discuss the manuscript, not the writer. While part of a manuscript might be unneeded and even boring, it's better to say, "I found this part a bit slow." You are free to suggest word choices or rephrasing to tighten a section or clarify what is unclear, but don't try to rewrite the manuscript in your own voice.

5. Offer suggestions and be specific.

If part of the story is slow, explain why and offer suggestions to improve it. Perhaps the plot is not moving forward or there is ample dialogue, but no action. Ask yourself why you are not interested and then explain that, using the rules above, to the author.

6. Don't take ownership.

Always remember, the writer is free to ignore everything you've said.