

How to Organize a Dynamic Critique Group

A critique group, sometimes called a “workshop” or a “beta reading group,” is typically a small group of writers who regularly meet to share and receive feedback on one another’s writing. Such groups are small (usually six to twelve members) to ensure that each writer has ample opportunity to receive feedback on their own writing while offering the same to others. Poets & Writers Groups makes it easy to organize a critique group of your own!

The role of the organizer

You are responsible for getting the group going, setting its preferences, sending out reminders of deadlines and meetings, keeping time, ensuring that members meet the group’s expectations, and vetting new members. You don’t need to be a teacher, and you are not expected to lead the critique or have any special knowledge to impart.

Getting started

You can use Poets & Writers Groups to set up a group in any way at all that pleases you. What we offer here is simply a template outlining how a typical group is organized. You should of course change and alter it to meet your interests and those of the writers in your group. Before creating a group, ask yourself the following questions:

1. How many writers should be in the group?
2. What level of experience should they have? Do you prefer to meet with writers who have workshop experience or who have already been published, or is your group for writers in the beginning stages of their writing lives?
3. What genres is the group covering/not covering?
4. How far along should the work up for discussion be? Are you open to discussing rough drafts, or would you prefer to critique more polished work?
5. Do you wish to meet in person or online?
6. How often will your group meet? (A group might meet once a month for 90 to 120 minutes, reviewing 4 or 5 pieces of writing in a meeting, giving each piece 15 to 25 minutes—enough for a fulsome discussion.)

Use your answers to the questions above to [create a group](#). Once you’ve done that, the recommendation engine will filter the profiles of Poet & Writers Groups members to find folks who match your preferences. Reach out and invite them to join! You can simply say: “I think you’d be a great fit for my group! Please take a look and let me know if you are interested.” Be sure to [log in](#) often to see responses to your invitations.

Establishing expectations

Once you have a few members, organize a first meeting to introduce yourselves, get a feel for one another, and establish expectations for the group. You can use the following questions to get this conversation going:

1. What meeting schedule works best for you? On weeknights, or weekends?
2. How often should each member submit work for others' feedback?
3. What length of work should be submitted? Short stories, essays, or poems up to a certain number of pages, a chapter or section of a longer work, or a full manuscript up to a certain number of pages?
4. What kind of feedback is expected? Written comments or simply come to meetings prepared for discussion, or both? Line edits or developmental edits? General writing points or very specific suggestions?
5. How much time does everyone need to read and comment on work before each meeting?
6. How should we handle absences?
7. What are the ground rules for discussion? (Some critique groups ask the writer whose work is being critiqued to remain quiet while the other members offer their feedback, designating time at the end of the conversation for the writer to respond; other groups might encourage the writer to be involved in the discussion, sharing their intentions for the writing and/or responding to questions.)

Your groups might come up with shared expectations that look something like this:

- Members will submit work to be reviewed 4-6 times per year. (Or every week or month, or whatever your group decides.)
- Members will read all work submitted by others and will come to each meeting prepared to provide feedback.
- Members will endeavor to attend all meetings. (You must let the organizer know if you are unable to attend and must send comments to the writers whose work was up for discussion.)
- If members consistently miss deadlines, do not attend meetings, or do not provide feedback on others' work, they may be asked to find a new group.
- Group members will always treat one another with respect and kindness and will follow Poets & Writers Groups' [Community Guidelines](#).

Post those expectations in the group so everyone has access to them. *Tip: Click on "Post" to add a message all members can see and comment on.*

Giving great feedback

The following are basic tips for giving helpful feedback in a critique group. Your group might want to change or add to these. Once you come up with guidelines you all agree on, post them in your group and refer to them regularly.

- Do:
 - Say what you like, what you think is working, and why.
 - Ask questions about the writer's intention or goal.
 - Point out where the writing is not clear to you and ask questions that might help the writer clarify.
 - Point out places where you think a piece is not working and why.
 - Provide examples from successful pieces that might support your points.

- Don't:
 - Hog the mic. Once you've shared your feedback, make space for others.
 - Pile on. If a point has been made, there is no need for you to repeat it.
 - Stay silent. A writers group only works if each member participates.
 - Make assumptions about the writer's intentions.
 - Rewrite another writer's work. Offer suggestions, not a new draft.

Receiving great feedback

Feedback goes both ways. Being a productive and helpful participant in a critique group requires giving but also effectively receiving constructive criticism. For more on this point, read Maggie Smith's article "[Building Together: How to Give—and Effectively Receive—Constructive Feedback](#)" in the January/February 2025 issue of *Poets & Writers Magazine*.

Keeping the momentum going

Before you end your first meeting, set a date for the second meeting! Ask for volunteers to submit work for review and set a deadline, allowing enough time for everyone to read and comment before the meeting. Plan to send reminders to the writers whose work needs to be submitted, and a reminder to all that they must review and comment on work before the meeting date.

And be sure to check in with your group often. Do members feel they'd like to meet more or less frequently? Do they want to submit longer or shorter pieces?

Remember, if you run into difficulties, P&W staff are here to help! You can always [e-mail us](#) to let us know what challenges you encounter, and we'll help you troubleshoot.