

The Greater Los Angeles Writers Society establishes critique groups as a part of its mission to create a nurturing and mentoring environment for writers of all disciplines. A critique group can help a writer of any level of experience improve his or her work in a peer-to-peer environment, while treating each member and their work with equal respect.

Submitting Your Work

It's a good idea to attend a critique group before bringing your own work. This will give you a sense of how the group works and the type of feedback exchanged before you put your own work out there.

When you are ready to submit, follow the guidelines provided by your Group Manager. Guidelines vary from group to group, driven by the size of the group, genre, and the number of people who want to read. Your Group Manager has the responsibility of facilitating these guidelines, but may amend them with the approval of the group to suit its needs. He or she may assign reading spots in advance, or accept all work and adjust the time spent critiquing according to the number of pieces to be reviewed. Your group may choose to read in advance, or on the spot, silently or aloud.

Writers should bring enough copies for each attendee to have one copy (though two people can share without too much trouble if reading takes place during the session.)

When you submit your work, begin by explaining to the readers where you are in the story (page number or a reference such as "half way through", or "Act Two") and provide some background or backstory if needed to understand the work. As the groups time is limited, keep your comments brief. If you have a specific issue or want the group to focus on a certain area (such as dialogue, characters, point of view, etc.) ask the question before readers begin.

Be sensitive to the possibility that the content or language of your creative work may offend some readers. If you think your work may be considered offensive, issue a warning so that readers may excuse themselves if they wish. If you find someone else's work offensive, you may decline to read and critique it.

Critique Format

The format for each critique group is determined by the Critique Group Manager and varies group to group. But there are general standards within the community.

Manuscripts presented for critique should be in the standard format accepted by agents and editors. The usual format is `Courier 12-point font`, double-spaced, with about 25-27 lines per page, which holds an average of 250 words per page. Your group may agree to accept Times or Times New Roman as an alternative.

This standard assures that every submission has approximately the same amount of text, so everyone submits an equal amount for review. Your critique group may set other minimum standards. Standards for on-line critiquing will vary since submissions are often cut-and-pasted into email files.

Critiques are limited to __ pages or __ in time. If you feel your scene must be read as a whole, contact the Group Manager for special arrangements. Bring enough copies for everyone to have his or her own copy. Manuscripts are distributed for written comments. It is not necessary to read at

each session.

Manuscripts will be read, silently or aloud, at each session. The total may be limited to _____. Those who read at previous meetings are last to read at the next meeting. Call the Group Manager if you plan to read. Non-members are NOT eligible to read.

Readers are encouraged to bring sections with which they are having difficulty. The first time a manuscript is presented, please bring the first ___ pages. For future readings, prepare a one page overview to benefit the person who is reading your story for the first time.

Offering Critique

Each participant should have an opportunity to comment briefly on the work. Good readers are able to be honest without being brutal. If you are new to critique, watch the more experienced people to see how this is done. Some ideas for offering critique:

- When it is your turn to comment, if an area stands out, either praise it or give suggestions for improvement. It is acceptable to say, "I have nothing to offer." Respect for other writers and his or her works is an integral tenant of the GLAWS mission.
- Begin with a positive comment. Appreciate the work by reflecting back what you liked, what resonated with you, what you remember (word choices, images, action, dialogue, etc.)
- Consider viewpoint, structure, characters, word choice, and be specific about the effect these things had on you as a reader.
- Note any confusion or problems you encountered when reading. If possible make a specific suggestion for improvement.
- Tell the writer how the piece made you feel, what interested you, and what do you want to know going forward?
- At critique, we don't have the author "explain" the work, so you *don't* actually expect the above to be answered. If you want to further discuss the work with the author, do it outside of the group. Be sure to separate the character or narrator in the work from the author personally. Never refer to the character as "you" or assume that the story is about the author.
- Comment on the work itself, not on what you think it means, or should mean, or how you feel about the work or its subject. It is fine to say, "I don't usually read this kind of book" and refrain from comment if you have nothing helpful to offer.
- If you have a suggestion for reading that would help the writer (another novel, a book on craft) mention it or note it on the manuscript.
- Write your comments on grammar, spelling, and word choice on the manuscript. Don't take time to point them out verbally. A standard markup guide may be used.
- Try not to repeat points that others have made, unless you can offer a different perspective. If you agree or disagree with a comment, note it on the MS so the writer will know.
- End with something affirming and positive. The writer was brave enough to put his/her work on the line and should feel good about that action, regardless of the comments.

Receiving Critique

When you are the person receiving critique:

- Be a good listener or take notes. Don't argue, explain or defend. Having a reader react immediately to your work and say what worked and what didn't, is very valuable. If you explain too much, you dilute that reaction.
- Don't be intimidated by the writing ability of your fellow group members, or by their suggestions for improvement. Even the best writers have room to grow. Honest feedback may be difficult to hear but it's the best way to improve your work.
- Have fun, and do NOT take everyone's critique as gospel. YOU are the one who decides what works for you and your writing. Keep a firm hold on your style and voice and remember that every comment doesn't necessarily improve your work.
- Notify the critique leader if someone is being unfair in written comments.
- Realize that it's possible you won't "click" with a critique group-- personalities, stories, writing styles, etc affect the ability for people to interact well and learn from one another. If this happens, try a different group, or pair off with one or two members in your group and form a new group.
- Receiving criticism is never easy. Try to remember you are among friends who are trying to offer helpful suggestions. What is said is a comment on your work, NOT on you personally.
- While your manuscript is being critiqued, you should refrain from comment or explanation except when specifically asked for clarification. No one may interrupt another person's critique. Time should be allowed at the end for open discussion.

GLAWS Requirements to enter and participate in a Critique Group

Prospective members **must attend two general meetings** prior to joining a critique group to show their earnest interest in supporting the goals and mission of GLAWS, "Writers Mentoring Writers of all Disciplines." Prospective members may **only audit critique group** (that is, they are prohibited from reading or otherwise participating) until their dues are paid and recorded by the Treasurer.

You must be an official member of the Greater Los Angeles Writers Society to read or submit at an official GLAWS critique group. In certain groups, you may be asked to submit work to the Group Manager before being allowed to join the group.

Participants may NOT CHARGE other members for their services, or solicit paid work within the Critique Group. Members should notify the Critique Manager if a solicitation arises. That participant will be asked to leave the group immediately. When such action is taken, the other critique leaders and the GLAWS Executive Board should be notified.

If a participant exhibits disruptive, rude, or dangerous behavior, the Critique Manager has the authority to ask that member to leave the critique group. Again, all members and their works must be treated with equal respect.