



Novemeber 2010 Newsletter

Writers Tip

“Writers Need Writers”

It’s true that writing is a solitary task and no one can write your story but you, but it’s equally true that writers should never work entirely alone. You need feedback, as well as support, and no one can provide that better than your fellow writers. Join a writer’s group, attend readings, work with a writer’s coach, participate in arts events for writers, network with your fellow wordsmiths. Be there for your writer friends because someday they’ll be there for you!

Send Me Your Writing Questions:

And I’ll do my best to answer them in this column. Your questions can be on the craft of writing or the business of publishing or the challenges of marketing your finished work or anything in between. I’m eager to hear your questions!

How to Start a Writer’s Group:

In keeping with my theme of seeking out support for your writing, I’ve posted a few tips for starting and maintaining solid writing groups. I teach a workshop on this topic as well, so watch for workshop dates in 2011.

Membership:

- Decide on a comfortable limit (typically from 5 to 25 members).
- Come up with an admittance process that includes rules each member must commit to and a process for screening new applicants, such as temporary membership or audition pieces.
- Look for people with similar writing interests, goals, and possibly styles/genres. Try not to get members who are much further along in their writing careers or much further behind (unless they show potential and are moving in directions that jive with your group.)
- If a member is not working, do an intervention. Either talk to him/her as a group, or choose someone to address the group’s concerns. If the offending member does not change his/her behavior, refer back to your rules as a

means of demonstrating that this group might not be the best place for him/her.

Meetings:

- Choose a regular meeting time (weekly, bimonthly, or monthly) and stick to it.
- Consider meeting year-round (perhaps with extra time off at the holidays) to keep things consistent.
- Have a specific place you meet each time or take turns hosting the meeting.
- Consider providing snacks or drinks or something else that encourages a break.
- Agree on a format for your meetings. Either jump right into the critiques or do a roundtable first where you can share updates and market information. Decide how many critiques you will do at each gathering and make sure you cover them all. Establish your own traditions and incorporate them into your meetings, for example, end with an inspirational quote about writing or have each member state what he/she hopes to accomplish before the next meeting, etc.

Rules and Guidelines:

- Establish rules and guidelines for your group and make sure each new member receives a copy. Try to stick to your rules, especially in the beginning, but also feel free to revise them as your group grows and evolves.
- Decide on guidelines for critiques: how and when manuscripts should be turned in; whether or not you will read the manuscripts before the meeting or at the meeting; whether or not your members will read their work out loud before critique; whether or not you will mark directly on the manuscripts or provide a separate page of notes (or both). Stick to your guidelines and make sure everyone both submits and critiques.
- Establish a schedule that will help you keep track of who is due to submit, host the meeting, bring the snack, etc.
- Accountability should come from a feeling of belonging to a group and wanting to uphold your end, but if members start shirking the rules or not turning in submissions or critiques, you may have to find ways to encourage those members to take their roles seriously. A writers' group only works when everyone is committed and responsible.
- If you are a large group, you may want to consider appointing officers such as scheduler, treasurer, historian, secretary, etc.

Motivation:

One of the true joys of belonging to a successful writers' group is being able to keep each other enthusiastic and motivated. So celebrate your successes, make light of your rejections, hold each other on course, and keep writing together. Here are some suggestions for motivating your members:

- Establish yearly or quarterly goals, both as individuals and as a group; keep track of your writing time and report to others; offer rewards; toast each other's successes; recognize group anniversaries; keep an archives of your published work; create a web site or chapbook to show off your writings; apply for grants as a group; take part in community writing events; do group readings; network with other writing groups; remind each other often of your strengths as writers; create wish lists of things you hope each member will accomplish or achieve; go on group retreats.

HAVE FUN!