

What Every Critique Partner Needs to Know

For a number of years, I did little more than give lip service to writing Nick's New Hear. The memoir about my one year old son who received a heart transplant nineteen years ago. I became serious about putting my story to words only after I joined a critique group. Being a member of a group made me move forward in my writing because it required that I produce pages. Through a critique group I improved my craft, learn how the publishing world works, found like minded people and best of all, a mentor. Without my critique group I don't believe I would have ever become a published author. Being a member of a collection of writers looking at each others' work regularly is one of the best ways for a writer to move their work forward. But, being a critique partner or a critique group member comes with responsibilities.

1. You must write. It isn't fair to the other members of the group for you not to bring in material. Agree on the amount to be critiqued at a time.
2. You must not critique based on what genre you read or don't read. Critiquing isn't about what you like or dislike reading, it's about improving the person's writing.
3. You must attend the meetings regularly. Your critiquing skills are counted on. Don't disappoint.
4. Don't make fun or belittle others work. This shouldn't have to be said but... A person's writing is like their child. You would never make fun of their child in front of them so, treat their writing as their child.
5. Find something positive about the writing and share it first. It always makes the "but" easier. Every writer has a strength. Talk about it. Build it up, then say what the writer needs to improve.

6. Be as encouraging as possible.
7. Open your own mind to learning something from your critique and from the others critiques as well. There is a chance you may need to learn the same thing as the other person being critiqued.
8. Say thank you. Even if you don't like what has been said. People are giving of their time to help you.
9. Don't take a bad critique personally. It isn't about you, but about your writing.
10. Be open to suggestions about your writing. You're having your work critiqued in order to improve as a writer. Use the help to your advantage.

If used, the ten concepts above will make a person a better writer and critique partner. Some of them are tough to achieve but all are worth the time it takes to follow them. This is a basic list and other concepts will be added as the writer becomes more proficient at critiquing.

I'm one of those writers that have to work, and work hard at their craft. Reading my rough drafts can make driving down a dry creek bed in a low slung sports car look easy. After editing my material, my critique partners earn their return critique and more. It does lower my guilt factor if I show my appreciation by critiquing their work. I have no doubt that I would have never succeed at writing or been published if it hadn't been for the people that have suffered (many times that is what it was) through reading my work.

Critiquing is a give and take, but all critiquers become winners and celebrate when a book is published.