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Polishing and Prepping

 0 Comments



I know, I know! We talked about editing in the first half of this text. Why bring it up

now? Because you're not done, my friend. Sure, you've polished to the best of your ability. Maybe you showed the book to a friend, who added her thoughts. Why worry about further perfecting your work? Because you're about to swing wide a door to invite agents and editors for a peek at your work. You want it to have what we in the south call "A Texas Spit-Shine."

It's time to open yourself up to critique. We'll spend some time in this chapter talking about where and how to do that. Whether you join a critique group online or attend a conference, getting input from others is critical.



Deep breath. You will survive this phase, I promise!

Joining a Critique Group

I don't enjoy criticism. In fact, truth be told, I'm a little sensitive. So when, as a young writer, the idea of a critique group first came up, I panicked. (Just keeping it real here!) How could I put myself in a position where people might make ugly comments about my beautiful writing? What if they didn't like my story?

Even now, as a pro, it's hard to receive critique from others. But one thing I've learned for sure over the years—my opinion, even about my own writing, isn't always right. And if I open myself up to the ideas and opinions of others, it's possible I'll have a stronger, more sellable, book. That's exactly why I still belong to a critique group, even after having nearly one hundred books published.

Here's my top ten list of reasons why people *don't* want to join a critique group:

1. Writing is a personal thing. How can anyone possibly know what I know about my story? This is *my* project, after all, not theirs.
2. Writers are weird. Why would I want to hang out with a bunch of weirdos?
3. I'm a solitary person. Aren't all writers? Don't put me in a room full of people. I like my privacy.
4. I'm too busy. Who has time to drive to a critique group?
5. My Project, My Baby. I'm "attached" to the project. It's beautiful to me. I see no flaws and I'm worried others will. They might call my baby "ugly."
6. Tell me what you love, don't tell me what you hate. I appreciate your words of praise, but your critique hurts my heart.
7. I won't know what to do with the comments others make. How can I possibly re-write my manuscript?
8. I'm not keen on critiquing someone else's work. I might hurt their feelings (or worse) I might not have the courage to be completely honest with them.
9. I don't have the skill to edit someone else's work. I'm no editor. I can barely write my own stuff.
10. I'll learn on my own, thank you. Don't ask me to learn from others.

Here are a few questions to consider after reading that list:


- ***Do you have any critique group hesitations?***
- ***If so, what are they?***
- ***How do you feel about someone marking up your writing? Are you flexible/willing to change your writing?***

When my friend Patti first asked me to join her critique group, "Inklings" I was a nervous wreck. Hang out with "real" writers? Would they shred my work?

I can now see that I would never have been published if not for that little group. Through Patti, I heard about my first writer's conference. At that conference, I took a class that piqued my interest in publishing. And I published my first book about a year later.

Consider this quote from Carolyn Jewel on the topic of critique groups:

The greatest benefit of joining a critique group is the opportunity to read someone else's work and to give feedback on it. If you can figure out why someone's story isn't working, then you'll be able to apply that lesson to your own work. It's much harder to analyze why something works. Good writing and story telling is seamless, you can't really put your finger on it, it just works and it's awfully hard to learn lessons because you're too busy enjoying the story. You might pick up some good techniques, but figuring out what went wrong is going to be a zillion times more helpful. ([Critique Groups](#))



Years have passed and I've now been involved in several different types of groups. Let me tell about the "types" I'm referring to:

Group #1: This was a tiny group of women (mostly unpublished) who were on a tremendous learning curve. We were all open to suggestions and were very supportive of one another's work. Maybe too supportive. We didn't spend a lot of time giving "serious" critique. We mostly encouraged.

**What are your thoughts about a group like this? What are the plusses?
What are the minuses?**

Group #2: After my first book was published, I was invited to join a "very serious" group of four multi-published authors. These women were very business-minded and took a great deal of time with one another's manuscripts. They would send a chapter/week to each member, and then, using the track changes feature in Word, cover the manuscripts in red (or green) ink. This took a little getting used to, but has turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me. I meet with these ladies one day a week for lunch and "writing talk" but all of our communication beyond that happens on the computer.

**What are your thoughts about a group like this? What are the plusses?
What are the minuses?**

Group #3: Years ago I joined a large (in this case, Christian) writing group in my area. We met weekly at a local church, where we had a teaching and critique. Once a month we met at our local Barnes and Noble, where we hosted a guest speaker. This group was "one big family" and I rarely stumbled across any jealousies or ugliness. In

fact, we all supported one another whole-heartedly. We celebrated together when a manuscript was sold. And speaking of sales, several of the folks in this group have made tremendous progress in the year I've been there. Some have acquired agents, others have published articles; many are regularly submitting book proposals. What I loved about this group was the camaraderie, the encouragement and the fact that we were all at different levels. (Side note: I'm of the opinion that the "ideal" critique situation would be one where you have someone you can glean from and someone who can glean from you. In other words, you'll be mentoring while being mentored.)

What are your thoughts about a group like this? What are the plusses?

What are the minuses?

Group #4: I'm part of a large online group of writers that offers online critiques. Over the years, I've found myself critiquing manuscripts for folks I've never actually met face to face. That's always interesting. For some folks (particularly those who are homebound), online critique groups are perfect. Still others need the face-to-face interaction and the ability to communicate vocally.

Suggestions for Critiquing Someone Else's Work:

1. Do your critique partners a favor by giving them a balanced critique: not too much, not too little. Too much could discourage, too little could overly encourage.
2. If the book/article has problems, hone in on it/them.
3. See if you can come up with a way to solve the problem you've found.
4. Let the writer know your suggestions, but be kind.

What would be the hardest thing about marking up someone else's project?

How are your problem-solving skills? Suggestions for accepting Critique on

your Work

1. Don't knee-jerk.
2. Don't assume the person giving the critique is either right or wrong.
3. If you have a doubt about a particular critique, see if your other partners feel the same way. (In my case, when I get a chapter back with suggestions for a specific change, I wait until I get that same chapter back from my other critique partners to see if any of them mention the same thing. If not, I come to a decision on my own about whether or not that section needs to be addressed).
4. Guard your heart. Don't take things personally.

Do you have a tendency to knee-jerk?

Do you think you can approach someone else's comments without offense?

Can you apply the suggestions of others to your work?

To critique, or not to critique?

I've had great experiences with critique groups. However, I've also found myself in situations where I ended up spending more time working on other people's manuscripts than my own. Recently, I had to drop out of one of my groups so that I could focus more on my own writing.

As always, balance is key. Helping is great. Receiving help is great. But if you find yourself spending more time talking about writing than actually writing, it's probably time to re-analyze your commitments.

Which do you enjoy more – writing or talking about writing?

SUGGESTED SITES: "Joining a Critique Group"

http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/childrens_writing/3737

American Christian Fiction Writers

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By **JThompson**

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