

RCWG CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

1. Always bear in mind that the ultimate goal of the group is to improve each member's writing, not to explain how you would have done it differently. (Imagine that you're an editor who has already agreed to take the piece. What suggestions can you give the author to make it as good as it can be?)
2. The scene belongs to the writer, not to the critiquer. Raise questions, offer suggestions, but do not tell the author that s/he has done it wrong, that it will never sell, that it has to be done differently—or any other form of absolute pronouncement.
3. Accept the writer's choice of genre, setting, plot and writing style. Within that framework, seek to identify ways in which the writing can be made more effective. Avoid seeking to impose merely stylistic corrections. (Punctuation and grammar errors can be noted on the page without necessarily spending time discussing them.)
4. If at all possible, open AND close with a positive comment. Do not pull punches, but do not humiliate the writer. Be honest but kind.
5. If something in the writing jars you as a reader, phrase your critique as: "That didn't quite work for me because..."
6. The critiquer never attacks. The writer never defends. The critiquer may raise questions, but the writer should not feel compelled to answer them. (After each critiquer takes a turn, the writer may wish to explain what s/he was trying to do and ask whether that specific thing worked.)
7. Do not belabor points identical to those already been made with respect to a particular scene, but DO note when you strongly agree or disagree with general or specific issues raised by others about the scene, especially where there seems to be a difference of opinion among the group.
8. Listen to critiques given to the writer by others. Be willing to recognize and acknowledge similar flaws/issues in your own writing.
9. Share your relevant experiences (e.g., particular communications from an agent or editor) but understand that they may not apply to anyone other than yourself and/or a particular submission.
10. Wait for your turn to critique. If you want to add something to what someone else is saying, make a note to yourself. If you have already had your turn, make a note and make your additional point *after* everyone else has had a chance. (If you think what you have to say will be stale by then, raise your hand and wait for the person being critiqued to acknowledge you.)

AUTHORS: When receiving critiques, do not defend your work, simply smile and nod. Remember you do not have to make changes, critiques are suggestions.