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How to Have an Effective Writing Group

By Stephen Earley Jordan, II

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The works you've written are numerous, ranging from short stories to even the novel, hidden in a storage bin (under the bed) collecting dust. But there comes a time when you must wipe away that dust, regain your pride, and prepare your babies for publication! But, how do you get such a critical, unbiased eye to analyze your works, offering both praise and criticism?

It's simple—start a writing group!

Creating a writing group is the easy part, but creating a functioning and beneficial writing group can be quite a task.

Writing groups are age-old sessions where writers obtain helpful evaluations for their works. Nowadays, though, writing groups seem to be a fad, and for many a status symbol reassuring them of their writerdom. Don't create a writing group simply for the sake of saying, "I belong to a writing group". Create or join a group because of the numerous benefits that come along with them.

Keep Number of Members Limited. You don't want just one other person in this group. So shoot for 3 or more members. On the other hand, you don't want to have 30 people in the group either. Try approximately 8–10 members. If one person leaves the group, replace that person with a new recruit. Keep the same standards for all members. Make it standard that members can only join by an invite. Allowing your group to be very exclusive brings the group more pride.

Select Randomly. It's okay to have a friend in this group, but you chose to create this writing group for unbiased opinions. So don't allow ALL the members to be your best friends in which you see on a daily basis. Perhaps one member is 18 yrs old, while the other is 35. Keeping age, sex, ethnicity, and educational levels of your group will allow a diverse critique—which is ultimately what you're seeking. A diverse group will only make you and the group much stronger.

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Meetings. We're all struggling writers, so most often the other members of the group will have jobs to attend. So finding an appropriate time for a meeting is crucial. I've found that one Sunday per month, after 2 p.m. is great. Make it an odd time. Creating times such as 2:07 p.m. will stand out and allow members to remember. Where are these meetings held? Keep switching locations. Allow the members to rotate the location to each of their homes. If homes are not available, then a select person should discuss where they choose the next meeting should be held. This is the reason membership should be limited to a few members. It's much easier to meet with just a few people.

Text. Focus your group on either poetry or prose—try not to mingle the two. If the text is prose, and the writer wants his novel critiqued, suggest that the novel be submitted on a "per chapter" (or two) basis. Don't overwhelm the members with too much to read at one time—or you'll end up with no members. The month before your work is critiqued, each writer should submit photocopies of their manuscript to each member.

Know your intentions. Make sure that, for the most part, members have similar goals: to be published or for sheer enjoyment of writing. This will eliminate time wasted if you know this upfront.

Critiquing. When critiquing the text, encourage the members to speak as if the writer isn't present. In the meanwhile, the author can sit back, take notes, and write down questions the critics may have posed. Encourage the critics to write on their versions of the text before meeting. Allow approximately 20 minutes to discuss each member's work. Upon completion of the critique, critics should give the author their "corrected" versions. Complete the critique by allowing the author to explain any unanswered questions and to thank the critics.

If members can't keep up with reading that much work per month, then divide it up. Four writers submit one month, while the remaining four submit the following month. Above all, writing groups should be a relaxed environment—away from your significant other, your children, and your job. Let this be a time where you hone your writing skills with the assistance of others who simply seek the same thing.

Stephen Jordan has five years experience within the educational publishing industry. Stephen was a freelance editor with such educational foundations as Princeton Review, The College Board, New York University, and Columbia University. Away from the office, Stephen promotes his creative writing with his home-freelance business OutStretch Publications and his artwork. Stephen holds two Bachelor of Arts degrees in writing and literature from Alderson-Broadus College of Philippi, West Virginia
Available for reprint. Please contact author so he can keep track of where his articles are being used.

Quick Tip –Use Article Announcement Lists To Promote Your Articles

By Ken Hill

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One of the easiest and most effective ways to get your articles to ezine publishers interested in running your articles is to submit your articles to announcement lists.

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These lists allow ezine publishers to receive your articles individually in emails, in a digest form, or to view your articles on the web where they will be archived.

Some good article lists for you to submit your articles to are:

1. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/article_announce/
2. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ArticlePublisher/>
3. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/free_content/
4. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Free_eContent/
5. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Free-Reprint-Articles/>
6. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FreeWrites/>
7. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/freezinecontent/>
8. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/netwrite-publish-announce/>
9. http://groups.yahoo.com/group/publisher_network/
10. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ReprintArticles-Paradise/>
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