



How to Give Helpful Feedback in a Writing Group

There are many ways writing groups operate – some meet casually over a drink and chat, others are more formal with written and verbal feedback. Over the years, the NOTL Writers' Circle has adopted a format that's successfully used by many long-standing organizations.

1. The writer sends in a submission that's distributed at least 2 weeks before the meeting. (More on submission in another note).
2. At the meeting, the writer reads a brief passage (about 500 words) and may opt to give a short background. *To allow more time for feedback, this step is optional.*
3. In turn, the other participants give feedback. The order is rotated so that different people can be 'first'. Notes are also provided to the writer on paper or by email, and **the original document is deleted from the reviewer's possession.**
4. When all the feedback is given, the writer may briefly answer questions (or not) or give more information in a short discussion period. (It's important to say thanks!)

Q & A

Q. *Why do we take turns giving short/specific feedback – without discussion – until the end, when everyone is finished?*

A. It keeps the discussion moving forward, professional, and focused on the writing. We're not a *debating* group. If you want to follow up, consider contacting the writer or other members privately. The NOTL Writers Circle is about supporting each other and learning how to improve.

Q. *How often can I submit?*

A. We take turns... new or less frequent submitters take precedent over a recent submitter.

Q. *How is feedback given effectively?*

A. Use the "Oreo" technique. Open with a positive statement. Briefly mention 2-3 things that you feel need more attention, or revision. (*You may have more private information in your written/emailed notes.*) Be specific. Give short examples or ideas that would be helpful. Mention something that was well done. Close with a positive statement.

In addition:

- Don't give verbal feedback on spelling, grammar etc. Write private notes (if they've requested that) in the document that you send back to the author
- Listen carefully to the other members' feedback and try not to repeat in-depth negative/critical information that has already been shared. Try to discuss something different. Sometimes—all that's necessary is, "I agree!"
- At the end, if there's time, discussion for clarification and understanding is great, but don't argue with the author or other writers
- Find unique/helpful points to offer to the author
- When in doubt – be kind