



Writing in Community Workshop

April 6, 2024

Peer-led writing groups provide community and support for writers at all levels of experience. These groups might be generative, where members write new material and respond to each other's work; critique-based, where members read and respond to each other's more developed manuscripts; or a hybrid. In this session participants will learn about forming and maintaining these groups so that they remain safe and nurturing environments.

“If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.”
—African proverb

- Millicent Jackson
- Jennifer Jacobson
- Christopher J Sparks
- Patricia Lee Lewis, Moderator



Writing in Community Workshop

Write*Angles* Conference

April 6, 2024

Presenters: Millicent Jackson, Jennifer Jacobson, Christopher Sparks

Moderator: Patricia Lee Lewis

Agenda

- 10:15 Welcome & Introduction of Presenters
- 10:20 Who else is here?
- 10:30 Each presenter will take 5 minutes to convey what they have learned by being in a peer-led group(s):
 - What they hoped for;
 - What works;
 - What doesn't work;
 - What is essential to success.
- 11:00 Open to Participants: questions & statements
- 11:40 Summary and wrap-up
- 11:45 Adjourn

Finding out what connects us, reveling in our differences; this is the process that brings us closer, that gives us a world of shared values, of meaningful community.

BELL HOOKS

WRITING IN COMMUNITY – Peer-led Writing Groups – How To & How Not....

Questions to think about as you consider starting or maintaining a peer writing group.

- a) what do you mean by a peer-led workshop?
- b) why would anyone want to be in, or initiate one?
- c) based on your experience with peer-led workshops,
 - i) what are the essential guidelines for success?
 - ii) what stands in the way of success?
 - iii) what assures failure?
- d) other issues to consider?
- e) resource materials?
- f) how can we all help each other?

For the Workshop on Writing in Community – Peer-led Groups
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Peer-led Workshops: basic structure

Groups generally meet for 2 – 3 hours, with writing time varying from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Can be in-person or on line.

Generative:

- gather (for sharing writing news &/or to give prompt(s))**
- writing time**
- break**
- read & respond – see hand-out for guidelines**
- close**

Manuscript critique:

- gather**
- review manuscript(s) for that session**
- say what is working well**
- make suggestions to strengthen**
- close with each person reading a favorite sentence or two**

Mss groups require preparation between sessions. See hand-out

Suggested Guidelines for Generative Writing Groups*

Patricia Lee Lewis, *Writing in Community*, 2024

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For the Writing in Community workshop at the WriteAngles Conference, April 6, 2024

Whether a generative writing group is peer-led or has a leader, members must work together to create and maintain a safe, confidential space in which to write whatever comes.

We are all vulnerable when we write any true thing; therefore, if the new writing is to be shared with the group, members must agree to follow certain practices in responding.

I adapted the following guidelines from those I learned from my mentor, Pat Schneider, founder of Amherst Writers & Artists. After leading hundreds of workshops and retreats of all kinds, I can say that they are reliably at the heart of forming and maintaining healthy, productive and fun writing groups—and community.

The Guidelines

We hold the writing of others in confidence;

We honor the writer by listening carefully;

We treat everything as fiction;

We refer to the narrator/speaker, not to the author, as the voice of the piece;

We remember that while healing often occurs through our writing, this is not a therapy group,
and we maintain our focus on the writing;

We concentrate on the writing at hand, not on anecdotes of our similar experiences;

We are free to write what we want; exercises are offered;

We are invited to read what we have just written;

We respond only with what we like, what stays with us, what moves us;
and not, at this stage of vulnerability, with what will make it stronger.

Write Your Heart Out!

Guidelines for a Peer Manuscript Group

Jacqueline Sheehan, jac.sheehan@comcast.net

Peer-led critique groups can be essential for writers, but only if writers follow certain guidelines to keep each other safe. One of the main reasons for developing guidelines is to enable writers to receive criticism so that it is helpful. The following are guidelines that have been adopted by a local manuscript group that began meeting in 2003. We have eight members. We came together after meeting at conferences and generative writing groups.

Our manuscript group is a peer-led critique group for writers who are working on large pieces: novels, non-fiction books or short stories. It is a closed group of writers who have committed to the hard work of honestly critiquing the work of others each month and who agree to follow a method that allows for the most useful sort of feedback so that we can all advance our work.

We meet once per month. We begin at 6:30 and we start on time. Three to four writers may submit their work each month. They need to send their manuscripts to us in a Word attachment two weeks prior to the meeting. Page limit is roughly 25-30 pages, with more pages allowed if it's a rewrite and we've seen it before. We select a moderator for each month, who keeps the flow going and monitors time. The moderator can also check in with the writer to be sure that she is getting what she needs from the critique. The moderator will do her best to keep the feedback productive, but there may be times when the writer receives a critique that is particularly difficult and the impact is beyond the moderator's awareness. In this case, it is up to the writer to make contact with the person who offered feedback to ask for clarification either in the moment or within a few days.

We follow four steps during the meeting.

1. We begin with the author reading a paragraph or so to us, so that we can hear the writer's voice.
2. Next, we share what we like and what is strongest about the piece.
3. This is followed by questions that we have for the writer, noting places where we may have felt bumped out of the piece, and places where we suggest revision.
4. After all feedback is completed, the writer can ask clarifying questions about the feedback or about particular things that she might be struggling with in the manuscript.
5. We finish by selecting our most loved sentences and reading those aloud to the writer.

We end the evening by going around with news (mostly writing news).