

## **GIVE & TAKE CRITIQUING GUIDELINES**

*Here are some points to keep in mind as you read and critique your partner's work:*

### **WHILE READING YOUR PARTNER'S WORK**

- **Ask yourself questions.**  
You need to think about your partner's piece as you read. Ask, Is this an important point, does it belong with the rest of the piece? How is the description and detail? Is the language concise and original? The more active you are as a reader, the more helpful your opinions will be.
- **Take notes.**  
A helpful critique is specific about what's working, what's not, and why. Saying "I thought your language was very effective" doesn't tell your partner much. Point out word choices in the piece that you thought were particularly effective. What did you appreciate about them? And why? How did they contribute to the piece? Take notes on your thoughts as you read so that you're prepared when you meet with your partner.
- **Determine both the positive and negative.**  
No one's work is perfect. Everyone's work has good points. Gather both the pluses and minuses as you read.
- **Be objective.**  
Remember, you are critiquing how well-crafted the work is – not the opinions expressed. You can disagree with someone's point of view and still feel the writing is good.

### **WHILE DISCUSSING YOUR PARTNER'S WORK**

- **Be courteous.**  
Opening oneself up to critiquing is difficult enough. Creating a "safe" and comfortable environment through polite behavior helps.
- **Be constructive.**  
This is a learning environment. Try to find things to say that will help your partner improve.
- **Start and end with a positive.**  
For example, you might say something like: "I loved the humor in the story and

the plot really hooked me in, but occasionally I thought the dialogue was a bit generic.” (Give a specific example about why.) “But if you cleared those parts up, this would be great.” Couching a criticism with two positives makes it easier for everyone.

- **Offer a solution.**

If you think there was a problem with the work, the best way to address it is with a solution. Rather than saying, “The opening didn’t set us up for the rest of the piece,” you could perhaps suggest how you thought it might’ve started differently.

- **Soften your language.**

Sometimes you can make a critique easier to take by the words you choose. For example, instead of saying “You didn’t connect with me,” you can soften it by saying “Maybe I missed something, but I couldn’t really relate to what you were saying.” Also, leading with “I” (“Maybe I missed something”) is softer than “you” (“You didn’t connect with me”). An especially effective approach is if you see a problem with a piece that you share, ie: “I noticed that some of your imagery was a little cliché because I’m working on that, too.”

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