

## Critiquing Poetry: A Brief Guide

*You have been assigned to a critique group where you will be able to share, workshop, and revise your poetry. Before you get started, you should have some knowledge about how to critique the poetry of others. Constructive criticism is extremely helpful in creating good writing, but it can also be intimidating to beginning writers. Here's how it should work, when everyone is doing his or her part to make the experience rewarding for all those involved.*

### Your Role as Writer

1. Come prepared with a piece of poetry that you would like to share/work on. (Each group member should have a copy. Label the line numbers.) You must view this piece as imperfect and unfinished... The point of critique is to help you improve, not to tell you how perfect your work is.
2. DO NOT apologize for your work. E.g. "Sorry guys, this really sucks..." Part of becoming a writer is acknowledging the fact that writing doesn't come out well the first or even 18<sup>th</sup> time. Don't apologize.
3. Identify the following for your group: What you were trying to accomplish with the poem, what you want to improve about the poem, and what information you'd like to know about the audience's response.
4. Tell your group if you would like them to address or shred your poem. Address = point out a few spaces that could be changed and explain those choices. Shred = be as critical as possible with a ruthless critique of the poem.
5. Read the poem aloud to your group. They should hear it in your voice. If you are unable to perform this task, nominate a group member to read the piece for you.
6. Listen to your group's feedback with an open mind. Don't get defensive—their suggestions are yours to determine whether to keep or ignore. Make notes on advice that you plan to take. Ask questions if you don't understand a comment.

### Not sure what to ask your group to look for? Try these:

- Sound/rhythm of the poem—does it sound good? Are there places that stick out as not flowing with the rest?
- I want to know how you feel when you read this.
- I want to know what you think I mean to say with this poem—not sure if it's coming through. Does the poem send the message of: \_\_\_ ?
- I need suggestions for some fresh metaphors/similies/personification.
- I think this is cliché.... Help!
- I want to make better word choices. Suggestions?
- I need another stanza but I'm not sure where to go with it.
- Please help with this specific part—it's not really saying what I want it to say.
- Am I contradicting myself?
- What could I change or add?

## Your Role as Critic

1. Label the poem with line numbers, to help you talk about it.
2. Listen carefully to the writer as she or she explains what they want to know about your reaction to the poem. Be sure to include some commentary about that in your response.
3. Listen to the reader as the poem is read aloud. Just listen and think. Then, look at your printed copy, read again, and take time making some notes. What do you like or not like about the piece? What specific words/details are successful/unsuccessful? What's your overall impression of the poem? Once all group members are ready to talk, the critique can begin.
4. Each person should take turns giving feedback. Start every critique with what you like about the poem. It's good to start on a positive note.
5. After you've given some praise, go through your notes on what you felt the poet could improve on, add, change, cut, etc. Don't feel bad for giving your true opinion. Be honest, but sensitive to the feelings of the writer.
6. Be as thorough and specific as possible—the more information the writer has to work with, the better.
7. End on a positive note by reiterating what you liked best about the piece.

### Don't know what to critique on? Try these:

- Sound/rhythm of the poem—does it flow/sound pleasing to the ear?
- Can you understand the statement the poet is trying to make?
- Clichés/lack of originality or truly unique?
- Redundancy, is anything repeated one too many times?
- Weak emotional venting should be turned to something more interesting.
- Rhymes—are they working or just making the poem too “cutesy.”
- Selection of words: bland or vivid?
- Tone—how do you think the speaker feels? How does the poem make you feel?
- Are there sensory images? Are they visible in your mind's eye?
- Is figurative language present? Is it successful?
- Do the theme and mood of the poem make sense?
- Do the verses and stanzas break in logical places?
- Is there anything unnecessary that the poem could survive without?
- Does it seem like anything important is missing? What might that be?
- Does this poem remind you of anything that might be helpful to mention?

