QUEENSLAND WRITERS CENTRE

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QWC RESOURCE SHEET # 11

Starting a Writers' Group

Many writers find support and assistance from being part of a writers' group. You may benefit from the company of people who understand what you're experiencing as a writer and many groups operate as critique groups where you can get detailed feedback on your writing.

If you'd like to join an existing group, contact Queensland Writers Centre for a copy of our list of writers' groups around Queensland. If there isn't one suitable on the list, try your local library as they may run a writers' group or know of one in your area. If you can't find a suitable established group, you may want to start your own.

Starting Your Own Writers' Group

Some things to consider when setting up a writers' group are:

- What is the objective of your group?
- What do you want to get out of it and also what the other members want to get out of it?
- When do you want to meet? Days, evenings or weekends?
- How often do you want to meet? Too often can be a strain for members, especially in a small group, but too seldom can cause members to lose momentum.
- Where do you want to meet? If it's a new group you may be more comfortable meeting in a public space, like a library, until you get to know each other.
- Are you going to critique each other's work? If yes, what are the ground rules?
- Do you want to have homework after each session?
- Will you share contact details so that members can meet outside of set group times?
- Do you want to set up a yahoo or google group so that members can chat online and share each other's progress?

Critiquing

If your group is going to critique each other's work, you may want to look at some of the guidelines that established groups use.

Vision Writers have the following in their critique guidelines:

"When you *give* a critique be honest. Tell the writer what you think the good and bad points of the piece are. Give them *specific* examples of each, so authors get a sense of where they are going right and wrong. Try to put forward an alternative that might solve the problem. Basically, just remember to give the type of feedback you'd like to receive in the manner in which you'd like to receive it.

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"When you *receive* a critique try to listen a lot more than you talk. Ask questions if you need more information but don't argue every criticism made, it's counterproductive. Write down what people say. It can get a bit overwhelming at times when you hear a dozen or more people review your work and it's easy to forget important points. Be enthusiastic about receiving criticism and let people know you appreciate the effort they've gone to."

Clarion South has strong guidelines for critiques and, among them, they say:

- Respond to the story first as a reader. Did it work for you? How did you feel while you were reading it? This information can be very useful to the author, even if you don't understand why you had a certain response.
- Acknowledge your biases. You may not be a particular fan of some genres or styles of writing. This doesn't mean you can't provide a useful critique of a story in a style that you don't generally like, but it's useful for the author to know where you're coming from.
- Try to see what the author is trying to achieve and direct your comments towards helping them achieve that.
- Critique the story, not the author.

Many QWC members have met their writing buddies and formed groups as a result of workshops they've attended at the Centre. This is an easy way to meet people with the same interests as you. If you've all gone to a workshop on travel writing, you know that you're all interested in writing and travelling!

If you do attend a workshop and would like to maintain contact with the other participants, ask if a sheet can be passed around with everyone's email addresses so that you can stay in touch.

If workshops aren't a possibility for you, you can always send a short paragraph to QWC (qldwriters@qwc.asn.au), outlining what you're looking for and we'll happily include it in our e-bulletin. Your call out might say something like:

WRITERS WANTED FOR WRITERS GROUP IN BUNDABERG
QWC member Joe Bloggs would like to meet with other writers interested in memoir and life writing. Joe is interested in starting a writers' group that will meet every other Monday at 11am at the Bundaberg Library for two hours. If you are interested please contact Joe at {email address} or phone {phone number}.

Is there already a Writers Group I can join?
Very possibly! QWC has a list of writers groups and will send a copy on request.