Critique Like a Boss:
Tips for Critique Groups
Kelley J. P. Lindberg

Never submit or self-publish without having fresh eyes edit your work!

3 types of critique/writing groups:
- Traditional critique group: Share scenes/chapters from your work-in-progress for critique.
- Exercise group: Regular exercises to improve your writing and get used to critiquing.
- Support group: Chat about writing goals/progress, advice, industry, conferences, etc. Build network. Can request critiques off-line.
- Blended: You can combine these groups.

Online vs in-person critique groups
- In-person groups (including Zoom)
  - Sometimes smaller number of members, more intimate, possibly leading to more personal connection and friendships.
  - They may be more invested in you and in helping you succeed.
  - Members often brainstorm together, building on each other's comments.
  - If they aren't helpful, it's harder to ditch them.
  - Since the meeting happens at a given time, more subject to scheduling delays.
- Online groups (email, file-sharing sites, etc.)
  - May be more members who can give you feedback, broader skillset.
  - Less schedule-dependent and location-dependent, so fewer delayed meetings.
  - Less personal, members may not be as invested in you.
  - Each person critiques in a vacuum. Less brainstorming.

Structure your group and establish rules:
- Traditional critique groups:
  - Set a reading rotation schedule, page/word-count limit, submission schedule.
  - Set critiquing rules. (Time limits, order of discussion, whether author can interrupt a critiquer's comments, etc.)
- Exercise groups:
  - Set guidelines on the types of exercises everyone in the group is interested in.
  - Set a rotation for who assigns the exercises each time.
  - Determine when exercises should be assigned, written, turned in, and discussed.
  - If you will critique the written exercises, establish critique guidelines.
- Support groups:
  - Determine what everyone's needs are in the group, and plan accordingly.

Basic guidelines for all groups:

- Set goals everyone agrees to.
- Set a schedule and location (in person or online).
- Set critique and meeting guidelines.
- Show up and meet your commitments!

Group members:

- It's okay to mix genres and audiences.
- You may want to find a group of writers at or just above your level.
- Okay to give a group or member a trial period.
- Okay to quit a group or ask a member to leave.

Tips for being a great writing group member:

- Give, don't just take.
  - If you only show up when you have something you want critiqued, you're only getting half of the value of a critique group.
  - Put 100% effort into reviewing others' work and helping them improve.
  - You learn more from deconstructing others' writing than from critiques of your own.
- Be respectful of everyone's time and needs.
- Don't go looking for praise. Look for improvement.
- Start and end with positives – what's working well?
- Be honest, but not brutal. Be constructive.
- Point out where something isn't working, but don't try to fix it. Let the author do that.
- Feel free to ask for specific feedback on aspects of your writing or the scene.
- When critiquing someone else's work, you can ask if *they* are looking for specifics.
- Mention triggers.
- Don't dominate the discussion.
- Don't argue with feedback. You don't have to do what they say, but listen respectfully.
- Don't be afraid to quit and find a new group if this one isn't meeting your needs.

Remember:

- You will improve your own writing by critiquing/deconstructing others' writing.
- Be a valuable critique group member:
  - Meet deadlines & commitments.
  - Write what you're supposed to write.
  - Critique what you're supposed to critique.
  - Show up for the meetings.

Build your tribe:

To help you build your tribe, here's a list of the types of reviewers and when they're most helpful:

Type of Reviewer	What They Do	When and What They Review
Critique groups or critique partners	Trusted writers who can discuss merits, gaps, character arcs, plot holes, etc.	Individual scenes or chapters, work-in-progress
Alpha readers	Readers who give you an overall idea of the story's impact on a reader, where it triumphed, where it needs work	Full manuscript, first complete (early) draft
Subject matter experts (SMEs)	People who can verify the accuracy of aspects of your story (technical, historical, scientific, occupation-related, etc.). Ex: a cop to review police procedures, a scientist to verify the science bits.	Just give them the scenes relevant to their area of expertise, at any stage of writing.
Sensitivity readers	A specific type of SME who reads for cultural problems, such as language or assumptions that may be inaccurate or offensive to certain groups (i.e., racism, sexism, ableism, other forms of bias).	Can see full manuscript or only scenes with relevant questions, at any stage of writing.
Beta readers	Like alpha readers, they read to show how your audience is likely to react to your book. May find last-minute problems. (Helpful Reedsy article: "What are Beta Readers — and How to Find Them" https://blog.reedsy.com/beta-readers/)	Full manuscript, final polished draft.
Fact checkers	People who check all facts, such as historical dates, tools that are relevant to the time period, measurements, etc.	Full manuscript, final polished draft. Seldom used by publishers these days. Authors are expected to have completed this themselves.
Copyeditors	The angels who focus on grammar, typos, punctuation, formatting.	Whole manuscript, final draft.
Professional editors	Editors who provide book editing (developmental, line, and copy editing) as a paid service.	Whole manuscript. Can edit at early draft or later draft stage, depending on need.