**The Dos and Don’ts of Critiquing**

Anyone who has been trying to get published knows the value of a great critique. Constructive criticism, done properly, can be inspiring, energising and invaluable to the writer. Unfortunately, as many of us have also learned the hard way, a poor critique can be damaging -- demoralising, frustrating and even block writing altogether -- worse than no critique!

Obviously a lot of that comes down to finding the right critique partner (s) or group. Here are some tips for finding the right CP and how you can create a positive and effective working relationship.

1. Be upfront and honest about what you expect from each other. This applies to everything from turn-around times, type of critique you need (overview, line edit, plot consistency etc), length of critique (chapter, partial, full etc), frequency of critiquing and whether or not you like suggestions/examples.
2. Establish a working style and process eg comments on the manuscript, a summarising email or both. Do you meet/talk regularly or when you have something to be critiqued? Both can be valuable, depending on the level of support you have elsewhere in your writing life.
3. Give it a trial run. This is important to figure out if you like each other’s work and voice and ensure your critiquing styles mesh. Also, if your levels of experience work well together for what you both need. While it can be useful for both writers to be at similar stages in their career, it can also work when they’re not. Eg An experienced writer and a newbie can work well together if you both are clear about what you need from each other. For example, a newbie needs the benefit of experience, while the more seasoned writer needs the fresh eyes of an objective reader.
4. Don’t be afraid to have different CPs for different purposes. Some of my CPs are awesome at reading for emotion and character growth, while some are fantastic at plot consistency. Some are great at line edits and others rock the fast overview read.
5. Don’t be afraid to move on if a critiquing relationship isn’t working. Our time is valuable, especially our writing time, so we can’t afford to waste it on something that is a blocker.

Once you’ve got a CP or critique group, it’s really important to remember some basic dos and don’ts!

1. Be constructive. Remember, you are just one reader with one opinion. Phrase your comments carefully.
2. Start with a positive comment!
3. Mention what you like/works for you as well as what you don’t/ doesn’t work. It’s easy to get bogged down in the negatives. Smiley faces dotted through a critiqued work really make a difference!
4. Don’t forget to explain why something does or doesn’t work. ‘I don’t like your heroine’ isn’t as helpful as ‘your heroine’s dialogue can sound rude and snippy’.
5. Don’t rewrite large chunks of text. Better to give an overall comment about why it needs work and let the writer change it in their voice/style.
6. Do give examples or suggestions of how to change eg how something might be phrased better or how changing the order might help understanding or how to make a sentence more powerful.
7. Don’t repeatedly correct the same mistake. Again, an overview comment about it is better than constant negative feedback. No-one enjoys a sea of red pen all over their work!
8. Do read through work as a reader first, then go back and critique it. That way, you can get an overall feel for the piece before you start. You’ll see the structure and flow, as well as the character and plot development. It also helps you to avoid making a comment about something that is resolved later in the pages!
9. Do share relevant expertise. This is important for ensuring the dialogue is appropriate and the terminology is accurate. But don’t assume you have expertise from watching TV or movies!
10. Do receive criticism in the spirit in which it is given. ☺ Remember that the comments that cause the most angst can lead to really effective changes in your work!

**Over to you. Do you have any useful hints or tips for finding a critique partner or group? Do you have any helpful advice about critiquing? Would you like to share any stories about good or bad critiques?**