

Workshop Guidelines

Dear Workshop Participants:

Here are some guidelines to follow so that our workshops are productive and helpful to all of us.

Please contact the Hereford Library and register each time you plan to attend the workshop.

In order to get better feedback on your poems, the more copies you distribute to the group, the better. We need to see the poem on the page as well as to hear you read it in order to give detailed comments and suggestions. Please try to send me a copy by email in advance so I have more time to think about it, and bring 7-10 copies to the workshop.

Group members have to be prepared to give others a critique concerning what works and what could work better in their poems and to receive a critique from others of their own poems. It takes a little experience to learn how to give helpful criticism with kindness and to receive criticism of your own work gracefully and make use of it, so that it is something helpful rather than something hurtful. We all have to teach those who are new to the workshop how to do this by example.

It does not do much good just to say the poem is good. What is good about it? Just giving people compliments does not help anyone get better, nor does focusing only on what doesn't work well in a poem at the expense of what does. Sometimes we feel a little pain or disappointment when we hear that our poem, written in a burst of joyful inspiration, is less than perfect. But what we want to do as a group is to inspire each other to revise and to make better poems, not to discourage anyone. Honesty and kindness-and being helpful are our goals. We must care enough about the art to listen to criticism and think about how true it seems and how to use it to our advantage.

But be true to yourself. Always remember that it's your poem. Reject what doesn't seem true but only after considering it carefully. Use what does seem true and to try and make a better poem. Keep both the original and the revision and compare them, which is better and why? The goal is to learn from each other, to gain in insight and skill, and to write memorable poems that soar, poems that deserve to be published.

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