

Andover SCBWI Critique Group Guidelines

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Welcome to our critique group! Whether you are a writer or illustrator, novice or experienced, published or pre-published, whether you visit us once or return and become a full member, we welcome you.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Andover SCBWI Critique Group Guidelines | 1 |
| About Our Group | 1 |
| Membership | 2 |
| Guest / Inactive Members: | 3 |
| Background and Basics | 3 |
| What IS a critique group? | 3 |
| A typical meeting: Business and Critiquing | 4 |
| Writing | 4 |
| Illustration | 5 |
| Notes about the Critique Process: | 6 |
| Facebook Group | 7 |
| Writers' Rumpus | 7 |
| Ways to connect with the blog: | 7 |
| Contributing to the blog: | 7 |

About Our Group

- Our members are actively writing and/or illustrating fiction and nonfiction books, magazine articles, and poetry for children ages zero through teens. Some of us have had work published; others are working toward that goal.
- We are sponsored by Friends of Memorial Hall Library, whose support allows us to use [library meeting space](#) and a library Zoom account. For more information, go to www.mhl.org. Memorial Hall's physical and online collections include many excellent resources for writers, as well as regularly-updated collections for children and teens.
- We are affiliated with the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI) and receive support and advice from the New England chapter. For more information, go to www.scbwi.org and www.nescbwi.org. We encourage everyone who is serious about writing or illustrating for children to join SCBWI. Information about free preview and dues here: . <https://www.scbwi.org/membership>

- We usually meet the second Wednesday of the month from 7–9 P.M (sometimes the first Wednesday). Some meetings are hybrid and some are fully remote on Zoom. See the current year’s schedule. No meeting is fully in-person; there is always a remote option.
 - Hybrid meetings happen both at Memorial Hall Library, Elm Square, Andover, in the ground floor Activity Room, and on Zoom.
 - Fully remote meetings are on Zoom only.
 - The second-Wednesday meeting schedule may vary due to holiday conflicts or library events. See the schedule for the current year.
 - For hybrid meetings: If Andover public schools are closed due to weather, or if the library is closed, we will be fully remote on Zoom.
- Marianne keeps a Gmail list of active members and members who are on a temporary break. About ten days ahead, Marianne sends an email to the whole group, indicating whose turn it is to submit for the upcoming meeting. The critique rotation list is always attached to that email; it’s a record of who’s on the active list and can be used to estimate how soon your first or next turn will be. (See Membership below.)
- FYI: Because we are always open, we are sometimes a big group. One benefit is that we don’t need to cancel or reschedule meetings if some people can’t make it. Another benefit is the wide range of perspectives you receive about your work. One downside is that members submit infrequently compared with small groups.

Membership

We have three kinds of membership: Full, Guest, and Inactive.

Full Members:

- Have attended at least two out of three meetings in the prior three-month period.
- Are on the critique rotation list and have regular opportunities to have their work critiqued, as well as the opportunity to critique other members’ work.
- If a Full Member’s attendance drops below two out of three meetings, the member is taken off critique rotation and becomes Inactive until attendance is back up. (Established, active participants may get an occasional pass due to extenuating circumstances.)
- If a Member knows she or he will miss the meeting during which he or she is scheduled to submit, the member alerts the group and the next person down the list (who is scheduled for the following month) can take their spot. The Member

can then take their turn next month, or they can “skip to double” their spot the next time they roll around on the list.

Guest / Inactive Members:

- Have attended fewer than two meetings in the past three-month period.
- Are not on the critique submission rotation list, but have the opportunity to critique others’ work, and to benefit from the discussion of others’ work.
- Are added to the rotation list after participating in two meetings during a three-month period. How soon the new member’s first critique happens after that date depends on group size.

Exceptions: A member who has been attending regularly, and knows and announces in advance that they will be unable to attend for three or more months for whatever reason (out of town, conflicting commitment, etc.), is added to the bottom of the rotation list their first meeting back, and waits for their turn to come up.

Attendance Note: A member who misses a meeting may submit critiques via email; if the member cc’s Marianne then the member is counted as attending that meeting.

“On Deck”: We critique five members’ work at each monthly meeting, on a rotating schedule. If someone who is scheduled cannot submit, that person lets the group know, and the first member who is scheduled for the next month (“on deck”) may sub instead. Whoever submits moves up the list. The one who misses goes into the first spot on the next month, or doubles up for the next time their spot rolls around (their choice).

A note about geography

Although every meeting has a remote option, we limit new membership to people who live within driving distance of Andover, Massachusetts. This helps to keep the size of the group within reasonable limits while remaining open to newcomers. However, well-established members who move to another location may choose to stay with the group if they are able to continue to attend meetings remotely.

Background and Basics

What IS a critique group?

Critique groups are made up of fellow writers and illustrators who meet for the purpose of providing constructive advice and feedback on each other’s works in progress. See also “Notes about the critique process,” below.

A typical meeting: Business and Critiquing

- We begin with business from 7 – 7:15. Business includes sharing information about conferences, workshops, contests, and related opportunities; sharing correspondence from publishers; discussion of matters related to the running of the group, etc.
- Critiquing begins at 7:15, or sooner if business is done and everyone is present.
- The person at the top of the rotation list goes first. It's expected but not required that the work was circulated prior to the meeting (see Critique Submissions below). Bring a few copies for visitors or in case some members did not print out their own.
- The facilitator makes sure that the conversation stays on topic and that everyone has an opportunity to contribute ideas and reactions. The facilitator may also keep track of time, or someone else might do it.
 - If it's a hybrid meeting, we take turns between online and in person critiques.
- Each critique can last up to 20 minutes. We complete five critiques each meeting. We end at 8:55 so we can leave the library promptly.
- **AFTER THE MEETING:** All members email their comments to the submitters. Or if you and the submitter are both in person, you may hand off a printout with notes.

What to Submit for Critique:

Writing

- Up to 5–6 double-spaced pages, or 1500–2000 words, per submission. (Most word processors have a tool for word count.) This translates to the entire manuscript of a picture book or magazine story, or a chapter or scene in a longer work.
- Submission of multiple unrelated works for the same critique slot is discouraged, even if the total word count falls within the limits. Multiple related works (such as a set of poems, or a picture book manuscript, pitch, and query letter for that same work) are fine.
- If you are submitting a chapter from a longer work, **PLEASE** include a brief synopsis of what has come before. This will help critiquers provide helpful info, because they won't be asking questions that are answered in previous chapters. Synopses do not count toward your total word count because they are not critiqued. (Unless of course you're submitting a synopsis for critique; then it does count.)
- If you are over 1500 words you are asked to put a note in the manuscript marking the 1500-word point so readers know they may stop there. Do not go over 2000 words, and do not go up to 2000 words and leave the reader hanging in the middle of a scene or chapter. Find a comfortable break point.

- If your chapters are significantly over 1500 words, you have a couple of options:
 - You may find a point to break your submission and send it as two separate submissions, rather than sending the whole thing at once.
 - OR you may announce that you're skipping your turn that month and let someone else submit. Then, the next time your turn comes up, you can have two submission slots and send the whole thing (up to 3000 words, plus or minus). This is for your benefit as well as the group's; it's difficult to give a thoughtful query on a work longer than 1500 words given the time limits of the group.
- **FORMATTING:** You do not have to use the format that you'd use for submitting to an agent or publisher, but following these guidelines helps us in the critique process:
 - Double-space your work and indent paragraphs as appropriate.
 - Include a **header or footer** with this information: **Your Name / Title of Work / Page number.**
 - Name your file with identifying information, for example "LastName_Book Title_Ch 1.docx" **NOT** "Sub to Critique Group.docx."
- Try to send your file by the Friday before the meeting, along with a brief note saying what you need most from this critique (plot, length, characterization, etc.). This gives members time to review ahead of time.
- Send your work by **REPLYING ALL** to the reminder email and attaching the file. **DO NOT CHANGE THE SUBJECT LINE.** Doing so makes it difficult for others to find your submission.
- It's okay to bring something other than manuscript for critique—for example, a cover letter, query, plot outline, synopsis, marketing plan. Note that if a synopsis is submitted to set context for a chapter submission, it is not included in the word count and will not be critiqued.

Illustration

- Send a PDF of the work in progress. If you have a book dummy or several related illustrations (e.g. character design sheet, sketches for a whole picture book) you may send them all at once.
- For in-person meetings, it may be helpful to bring a printout of the art in case we're having technical difficulties and cannot project the art onto the screen. (Zoom participants will see it through screenshare.)

PLEASE! If you are not substantially ready to submit by one week ahead of the meeting, email the group to pass your spot to someone who is scheduled for the following month. Reason: Even if you think you can get your submission ready in time,

a system crash, accident, virus (computer or human), etc. can thwart your best intentions. It's sad for you, but it's a loss for the whole group too, because the critique slot is wasted.

If you pass on your turn, you have two options:

- Take your turn the following month instead.
- Double up your time and word count the next time you come up in rotation.

Let Marianne know which option you choose.

Notes about the Critique Process:

- Members need to know that their ideas and works in progress are safe, in order to participate. NEVER talk about the work of other members outside of the group. NEVER mention works-in-progress on the internet. NEVER use another member's ideas in your own work (okay to use ideas that members share about your work). Delete other members' works in progress from your computer after critiquing.
- You should expect to hear about the good and the bad, the graceful and awkward, the beautiful and the ugly. That is the point of critiquing: providing useful, constructive criticism to improve each others' work.
- Expect to disagree with others, about your own work and about others' work. That's okay; the purpose of a critique group isn't to agree. The purpose is for the author or artist to collect a variety of viewpoints, some of which will be useful for revision.
- You do not have to act on all of the suggestions from everyone in the group—in fact it won't be possible, because some advice will conflict. All viewpoints are valid, but YOU are the one who decides which suggested changes will strengthen your work.
- It can be difficult at first to hear criticism of your creative output, but it's an essential part of the process if you hope to grow as a writer or artist. Accept all comments graciously—the ones you agree with, and the ones you don't.
- Remember the “constructive” in constructive criticism. Critique others as you would have them critique you. “Sandwich” comments about things that could be strengthened between comments about things that are already working well. And remember—if a writer doesn't know something is good, she might delete it!

Beyond the Meetings

Facebook Group

We keep a private [Facebook Group](#) for group conversation and news in between our meetings. It has quite a few alumni of the group and the Writers' Rumpus blog, in addition to current members. Anyone who's on the rotation list is welcome to join. Contact Hilary Margitich, the current admin for the FB group.

Writers' Rumpus blog

Some past and present members of the group keep a blog, [Writers' Rumpus](#), where we post on Tuesdays, with occasional posts on Fridays. The blog also has pages of [helpful resources](#). The blog started in 2013, and while our following is only a few thousand, those who know us, respect us. (For at least one of our members, Writers' Rumpus helped get her manuscript read by an editor who was familiar with the blog.)

Please follow our blog and explore the wealth of content. If you're new to kidlit, it's a great way to learn about the kidlit world.

Ways to connect with the blog:

URL: www.writersrumpus.com

The best way to subscribe to the blog is to sign up for emails using the widget in the right-hand column of the blog. Although we have a Facebook Page for the blog, WordPress (WP) does not reliably publish to it. And WP no longer publishes to Twitter/X. If you have a WordPress account, you can subscribe to the blog through WordPress Reader.

- Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Writers-Rumpus-Blog/177046879129765>; unfortunately, the auto-populate from WordPress no longer works.
- Twitter / X: @writersrumpus (Sporadically active. If you'd like to commit to posting on behalf of the blog, let us know.)
- Instagram: writersrumpus (Currently inactive. If you'd like to commit to posting blog posts on the Instagram account, please let us know!)

Contributing to the blog:

Posting on the blog is an opportunity, not an obligation. Any member who is on the rotation list is eligible to contribute, either as a one-time thing or on a regular basis. Please follow the blog and spend some time familiarizing yourself with its schedule and

the type of content posted before signing up to contribute. If you'd like to contribute, send the admin, Laura Cooper, an email (cooperlaura@yahoo.com) saying what topic you'd like to post about, and she'll be in touch.

In-Person Meet-Ups

Sometimes, a group member schedules an informal in-person meet-up where we current and past members can get to know each other better as people and as kidlit book creators. These are fantastic opportunities! Feel free to organize one—at a restaurant, a park, a public event, or your own home if you're willing and able.