**Syracuse Writers' Roundtable**

Guiding Principles, Draft 1.1, January 2002

Mission statement

The Syracuse Writers' Roundtable is open to all writers who seriously want to improve their craft and to help others improve theirs. We offer each other support and constructive criticism, and we share ideas and resources related to writing. Our members write and share many genres of short stories, novels, non-fiction, screenplays, and poetry.

Reader's expectations

*As a reader I expect:*

1. Honest, courteous responses directed toward my material, not toward me personally. I understand that my writing may not appeal to every listener and that not everyone need respond.
2. That there will be no interruptions while I am reading and that others will not conduct side conversations.
3. That others will not attempt to rewrite my work, although I am interested in suggestions for improving it.
4. That others will criticize the my work with regard to whether it is effective writing, not on the basis of its content or subject matter.
5. That comments and suggestions will be offered by show of hands, and I am free to call on responders in any order.

Critic's expectations

*As a critic commenting on other's work, I expect:*

1. That when called upon, I will be allowed to express my thoughts about the work without being interrupted by the author or others.
2. That if the author disagrees with my comments, we won't argue; I will drop the subject and go on.
3. That no one is required to follow my suggestions, but the author should at least be receptive to my input.
4. To form my opinions based on the work itself, without the author giving lengthy spoken prefaces and without explanatory interruptions. If a spoken preface is essential, it will be brief.

For all attendees

1. We all have a right to our opinions, but a writers' group is not the place to try to convince others of one's political or religious views or one's taste in literature.
2. Many people have found that writing about painful experiences is therapeutic. It is appropriate to share such writing with the group, but we must remember that a writers' group is not a therapy group.
3. Similarly, a writer's group is not a place for merely venting our feelings.

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1. Although our meetings are open to the public, we should treat writing shared in the group as intended only for those present, unless the writer gives permission to do otherwise.
2. If you think something you are about to read may offend some listeners, announce the fact so those who wish to leave temporarily may do so.
3. Criticism may be positive (e.g., "I really like the way you used rhythm to build emotional energy.") or negative (e.g., "I think you characterization of Richard is weak. I don't get a sense of what kind of father he is."), but it should be constructive in that it gives the writer possibilities for improvement. Non-constructive criticism would be something like these: "This is no good. My eleven-year-old niece could do better." Or "I love this, but I don't know why."
4. We can learn a lot from hearing other people's work criticized. Thus, paying respectful attention does not end when a reading does. We should not break apart in separate conversations during the period of comment.
5. We meet in a public place and must be respectful of the rights of our host store and its customers. We should clean up after the meeting, reshelve books (if we know where they belong), and return chairs to their places.
6. We should share in the joy of each other's success.
7. **The most important thing is to help each other improve our writing.**

Suggestions for effective ways of using the group

1. Except for special circumstances (like a looming deadline) we should make our work as good as we reasonably can before bringing it to the group. If possible, use spell-checking software. There is no point in spending the group's time fixing things the writer could fix him/herself. NOTE: this is not the same as knowing something is wrong but not knowing how to fix it.
2. If possible, double-spaced printed copies of the work should be distributed to attendees. This helps visually oriented people, helps when we have trouble hearing soft-voiced readers above background noise, and is the most efficient way to make many notes and corrections. All copies should be returned to the author unless some other arrangement is made.

Procedural

1. We generally read in the order in which we arrive and sign the attendance list, but order can be altered by mutual consent. People who must leave early can be given priority, and people who miss a turn for lack of time may be moved to the head of the list the following week (if they arrive reasonably early).
2. We try to divide time up so that everyone who wants to can read. However, even if there is plenty of time, spending more than about half an hour per person results in wandering attention.
3. We usually take a ten-minute recess near the mid-point of the meeting.