

The Importance of Critique for Serious and Successful Writers

We all learn how to write in grammar school, work on those skills in middle school, torture ourselves and our teachers through high school, and finally embrace the Muse that has perched on our shoulder in college and won't leave us alone. Many writers know at an early age their passion is the written word; others come to that realization later in life, but all successful writers learn writing techniques that serve them well. Let's face it: anyone can put words on a page and call it a story or divide those words up into stanzas and call it a poem. But successful writers know that constructive feedback is tantamount to perfecting the craft of writing.

There are many tools that writers, who are serious about their craft, can use to hone their skills as writers. After struggling with the first draft of a piece, it is best to let it percolate for a while and come back to the page with a fresh eye. No one ever writes "The Road Not Taken" in one sitting. It is important to recognize that writing is a repeated process of draft and craft, and with each revision, nuances and tighter language can emerge properly. Once a writer has a piece he/she is fairly satisfied with, it's time to send it out into the world for another opinion. Other eyes may see what you have missed, offer a different perspective, and question what you have taken for granted.

It is important that a writer does not exist in a vacuum. There are many quality writing workshops, continuing education courses, informal writing groups, and low-residency MFA programs that afford writers trustworthy outlets for critique. While you may be tempted to have your mother, your significant other, or best friend read your work, they should not be your only editors. They are not trained to critique, may not understand your work, and may try to preserve your feelings, regardless of their true opinion.

Choose a fellow writer who has already published work in the creative writing field. Network with editors at writer workshops. Seek out those who share your passion for the written word. Research credentials of those to whom you entrust your work. Be wary of online workshops whose principals may not be trained in constructive critique or where untrained writers/members may trample your work. You may want to search for websites to find listings of weekend and/or one-day workshops in your area.

Once you have received feedback from a source you trust, you can get back to revising again. Keep in mind you do not have to incorporate all suggestions that have been made. In fact, some writers revise TOO much.

Look for the criticism you've received numerous times before changing the voice of your entire novel because one agent decided he or she might like it better if written in third person. The object of critique is to force the writer to take an objective look at what has been written, evaluate its suitability, tighten the piece where needed, then let your words stand on their own.

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