

BSFW Critique Group Etiquette:

Below are the procedures for participating in a BSFW critique session. It starts with preparing your submission for critique, goes on to how to participate in a critique session (as the critiqued and the critic), and finally etiquette on the Meetup website. Please read them carefully. Any questions can be sent to an organizer.

FOR THE WRITER:

Before a meeting:

1. Make sure your work is paginated, double spaced, with a word count. Makes it easier for us to refer to sections. [For a clear example of what it should look like, go here. http://www.shunn.net/format/story.html](http://www.shunn.net/format/story.html)
2. As much as possible, remove minor editing mistakes so we can focus on your story. You would benefit more if you submit a draft that has been worked on, and perhaps you are in a “stuck” place, or don’t know what it looks like to a reader.
3. Submit your material by the due date, so everyone has enough time to look at your work.
 - a. Email your submission to bsfw.meetup@gmail.com
 - b. SUBJECT: The Title of the group you're submitting to and your name. EXAMPLE: Cam's Novel Group December 8th, Spidercam
 - c. MESSAGE: Name, Title, Word Count, any additional info. EXAMPLE: Spidercam, Glory Chapter 2, 7,000 words. This is a rewrite.
 - d. Attach your document. **RTF and DOC are preferred.** Please, NO PDF's or DOCx.
 - i. What to Expect: Nine days before the meeting you will receive an email from Meetup with links to download each story for critique from our Dropbox account. Click on the link and download the stories.
4. Please respect the 7,500 word count limit, plus or minus 100 words. That’s on the high end of an average length, published short story. Also, we usually have several pieces to consider each meeting, and every writer

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deserves a critique that is not rushed for time.

While being critiqued:

1. A *writing critique* is not a personal critique. It is understood, that writers put a lot of energy and thought into their stories. **However, you are not your story, and it is not you; it's a piece of art that you have created, and that is what we are attempting improve.** Allow for some distance between you and your story, as well as the varying levels of critique and writing skill in the group. The critique group is not meant to be the ultimate arbiter of your worth as a writer.
2. During the critique, try and say nothing (note taking will keep you occupied).
 - a. Explaining what you meant to write during the critique is not helpful, since we as readers only get to see the text. If we didn't get it, that is a very useful and important thing to note.
3. Write *everything* down, not just what you think you need. Even if the critique is not essentially perfect for your story.
4. **Listen for the "dittos."** You may find that if enough people notice something about a certain character, plot point, language usage, that is a pattern that you need to pay attention to.
 - a. When you go over your notes, something that was too hard to hear in a group may make sense later.
5. Take note of important issues and comments about stereotyping, categorizing, bigotry, ageism, racism, sexism, etc. that are author's voice and not character-based. We all do this to some extent. It's hard to hear, but necessary for today's world.
6. Don't be afraid to tell a critic that something is inappropriate. Our group is pretty free of this problem, but just in case it gets too personal, you can say that maybe a remark is not appropriate.

After the Critique: Questions to ask the group:

1. What didn't you understand about the critique? My usual is all the lit-crit terms I missed in college.
2. How did the readers feel about xyz?

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3. If you need suggestions, ask for them very specifically, like “What should happen to my secondary character at the end of the chapter?” or “Does the jump in time of a thousand years make sense, and if not, why not?”
4. Are there any authors the group can suggest that might help with your writing (If they haven’t already done so)? Take notes! Read the suggestions. Our group is very literary and knowledgeable about the field and literature in general.
5. If it all gets to be too much, say so. We’ll shut up.

FOR THE CRITIC

Written Critique¹:

1. **Make sure you’re discussing the material and are in no way critiquing the writer as a person, or their decisions to choose that particular story to tell.** It’s certainly valid to ask questions. But, even if you think it’s a positive comment or meant to motivate or spur higher levels of thought and writing, please refrain from doing so because:
 - a) There’s always plenty of room for misinterpretation.
 - b) If it’s a judgment on the character of the person, it’s almost impossible for it to be taken in the spirit it was meant.
2. Refrain from using all caps, because (unless something was really that good) it’s generally interpreted as shouting, and that can provoke unnecessary and unhelpful emotional reactions.
3. Sarcasm is not helpful.
4. If you are writing your critiques digitally, then please do so in a way that makes it easy for the writer to distinguish your critiques from their writing. Examples: **bold**, [brackets], new comments, highlights, and track changes. The added bonus of track changes and Word comments is that it’s easy for the writer to accept or decline your remarks. The critiques usually come in the form of line editing with a summary of impressions, either at the beginning or the end of the text.
5. **Try to read the story more than once.**

Comment [CR1]: New Comments/ This is an example.

¹ Written critiques are necessary, for each story of each session.

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6. If this is for the novel group, try to notice and comment on structural patterns you appearing from submission to submission. This is made easier if the writer submits a summary.

During The Critique Session

1. Do your best not to interrupt other critiques, they only have three to four minutes to make their point.
2. **If someone already said what you wanted to say, just “ditto” and perhaps elaborate**, but don’t repeat what they said as if the writer didn’t hear you.
3. During the session, listen to others give feedback. In the hopes of being as helpful as possible you might want to connect your verbal critique to...
 - a) What big ideas you got from the story, overall theme/message (Love is good, power corrupts, etc.)
 - b) What the intentions of the writer were? Character story? Mystery? A.I. mishaps?
 - c) What archetypal or mythological relationships are explored in the writer’s work: mother/daughter; sibling rivalry; father/son; etc.
 - d) Were the intentions achieved? How? Why or why not?
 - e) How is the language used and does it help or hinder the story?
 - f) Are there loose ends? Unexplained phenomena that need to be explained?
 - g) Is there an internal logic? (i.e. do all the robots have OCD, or just some of them, and if so, why?)
4. What is your *emotional* response to the story? Tell the writer! We need to know about the gut reaction of the reader.
 - a) Did you feel this way because the story was so good?
 - b) Did you feel this way because the writer was driving you crazy?
 - c) Did you feel this way because of a resonance in you that the story evoked?
 - d) Did the writer intend these reactions?
 - e) Did the story hurt you personally (cf. racist, ageist, etc.)?
5. If it isn’t your genre or to your taste, you can still critique structure, plot, characterizations without getting into your personal genre preferences.
6. Don’t belabor a point, even if the writer is being stubborn about hearing a critique.

7. Find something to praise. There is no consensus on when to say this. For many, it helps at the beginning (but then here comes the bad stuff.). Me, I prefer a nice comment at the top, the critique, and then a supportive but *useful* conclusion.
8. If you have noticed a habit (especially not good ones) that a writer has, and continues to have throughout their work, it might be helpful to point it out. For example: “You have excellent snappy dialogue, but all your characters have snappy dialogue, in all the pieces you write. That is fine, but perhaps you might try to work on narrative or other characters that aren’t so clever.”

Post Critique Session Etiquette:

1. Do not use the public space of the Meet-up comments to vent about a member you didn’t agree with. The comments will be deleted.
2. Please send your critiques to the writers of an attending critique session within a week.
3. If you don’t receive a critique from an attending member within a week, it’s perfectly acceptable to send them a personal message via Meetup, and ask for the critique feedback.
- 4. It’s nice to say thank you.**
5. If you have any issues about how a Meetup was conducted or have suggestions to improve BSFW, please send your commentary directly to an organizer via email.
6. Keep the language for all discussions and comments on the website “family friendly.” You never know if children are reading over the shoulder of a BSFW member at their personal computer.
7. It is perfectly reasonable for you to do your own unofficial critique sessions with people you’ve built a relationship with, on your own time. We encourage you to do so. But, please note, *only organizers are allowed to post or suggest Meetups on the BSFW Meetup Calendar*. Others will be deleted.

Hopefully this was helpful. If this is your first time critiquing in a group or having your own work critiqued, don’t worry. You’re in good hands. Welcome to BSFW.