BSFW Critique Group Etiquette:

Below are the procedures for participating in a BSFW critique session. It starts with basic guidelines to prepare your submission for feedback, then explains the basics of a critique session, and ends with etiquette on our social media and Meetup site. Please read them carefully. Any questions can be sent to an organizer.

FOR THE WRITER:

Before a meeting:

1. Make sure your work is double-spaced and in a font that is easy to read. Click here for a clear example of proper manuscript format.

2. **Edit your submission,** so that we can focus on the story overall. Some members will take it upon themselves to line edit anyway.

3. **Submit your material by the due date**, so everyone has enough time to look at your work. Most of them follow a similar format to the following:
    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. For novel critiques, a summary of the previous submissions should be at the top of the document, so new readers have an idea of what came before.
    e. Attach your document. **RTF, DOC, and DOCX are preferred**. **Please, NO PDF's.**
        i. What to Expect: Around nine days before the meeting, you will receive an email from the Meetup organizer with links to download each story for critique from a Google or Dropbox account. Click on the link and download the stories.
    f. **At the top of the document, you can tell the critics what specific feedback you are a looking for as well as the kind you *don't* want.**

4. **HOWEVER: Follow the submission directions written in the description of the critique group you are attending, they are subject to change.**

5. **Please respect the word count limit, plus or minus 100 words.** 7,000 words is on the high end of an average length, published short story. Also, we usually have several pieces to consider each meeting, and every writer deserves a critique that is not rushed for time.

6. **BSFW does not critique work that has been written using AI. BSFW does not allow for members to use AI to critique each other's work without expressed *written* permission from the author.**

    a. BSFW has an anti-AI stance in regard to any work submitted for critique. Authors are here to learn how to write for a professional audience. The majority of professional editors and publications will blacklist authors who submit AI created pieces without declaring it as AI. None of the major awards in genre or literary fiction will accept AI created stories. It is a breach of trust, professionalism, and etiquette to do so. If you have questions you may have a conversation with an organizer.

While Being Critiqued:

1. A writing critique is not a critique of you as a person. Nor is it a critique of your worth as an author. **You are not your story, and it is not you; it is a piece of art that you have created. We are focused on this.** Allow for some distance between you and your story. There are varying levels of critique and writing skill in the group. Take in the critique feedback holistically.

2. If this is for the novel group, try to **notice** and comment on structural **patterns** you notice from submission to submission, positive or negative.

3. During the critique, focus on taking notes while people are giving you their feedback. **Explaining what you meant to write during the critique is not helpful**. If we "didn't get it," that is a very useful and important thing to note.

4. **Listen for the "dittos."** You may find multiple critics notice similar things about an aspect of your story..
    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 divorced from character perspective and motivations. We all do this to some extent. It's hard to hear, but necessary.

6. Don't be afraid to tell a critic that something is inappropriate. **You can also say in the document of your story what kind of feedback you are looking for and what you are not looking for.** If you feel uncomfortable with the confrontation, then please communicate with the event organizer running the meeting at a time and place that is comfortable for you. Please do review our anti-harassment policy.

After the Critique: Questions To Ask The Group:

1. What didn't you understand about the critique? Sometimes there are the lit-crit technical terms that you may have missed if you weren't an English major.

2. How did the readers feel about xyz?

3. Ask for follow-up comments or brainstorm a particular problem you were trying to solve.

4. 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?"

5. Are there any authors the group can suggest that might help with your writing (If they haven't already done so)?

6. **If it all gets to be too much, please say so. We will shut up. The host for the critique group is your partner and your advocate.**

    - If you have additional questions or want more feedback, you might ask on the BSFW Discord. Some novel groups have a general Discord channel for continued conversation. Once you develop a relationship with the critique partners, you might even ask for follow-up. But that is an organic process, and it should not be assumed that the critic has additional time for your story. Also, please refrain from asking for or sending additional commentary to the meeting host for additional feedback unless asked to do so.

FOR THE CRITIC

Written feedback is required for each submission in a critique session. For some groups, the feedback is required before the meeting so the author can ask more specific follow-up questions.

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. **Do not use all caps,** because (unless something was really that *good*), because it's generally interpreted as shouting and that can provoke unnecessary and unhelpful emotional reactions.

3. **Sarcasm and snark is never helpful.**

4. If you are writing your feedback digitally, then please do so in a way that makes it easy for the writer to distinguish your feedback 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.

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

5. 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.

6. Try to read the story more than once.

7. **DO NOT FEED A SUBMISSION INTO ANY AI WITHOUT WRITTEN PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR.** This is a violation of trust.

During the Critique Session

1. **Do not interrupt other critics.** You do *not* however need to stay silent if a critique crosses the line: rude, sarcastic, bigoted, any form of harassment.

2. **If someone already said what you wanted to say, just "ditto" and perhaps elaborate,** but don't repeat what was said as if the writer didn't hear it.

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 archetypical 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 of a resonance in you that the story evoked?
   c) Did the writer intend these reactions?
   d) 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, and characterization without getting into your personal genre preferences.

6. **Don't belabor a point**, even if the writer is being stubborn about hearing a critique. They are under no obligation to hear you. At the end of the day, it's their story. This is not an intervention.

7. **Find something to praise.** There is no consensus on when to say this. For many, it helps at the beginning. Some prefer a nice comment at the top, followed by 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 BSFW social media to vent about a member you didn't agree with.** The comments will be deleted, and you can expect to hear from one of the organizers.

2. Please send your critiques to the writers of an attending critique session within the time frame expected for that critique group. **Remember to read the group description on Meetup.**

3. If you don't receive feedback from an attending member within a week, it's perfectly acceptable to send them a personal message via Meetup or email and ask for the critique feedback. Y**ou can also reach out to the organizer and they will ask for the 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.

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**. Make connections and friendships! But please note*, only organizers are allowed to post or suggest Meetups on the BSFW Meetup Calendar.* Others will be deleted.

8. BSFW is not group therapy. This is a shared space for creatives to commune around the writing of speculative fiction. Please, respect people's personal boundaries.

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.