

A Day in the Life of a Writer – Critique Partners By Tami Brothers

To join a critique group or not? Would I really benefit from having another unpublished writer look at my work? What can I give them when I can't even get my own writing published? I work full-time and have a family. How can I spare what little time I have left to critique someone else when I should be focusing on my own writing?

This seems to be a major topic among writers, whether new to the craft of writing or a long time member in their local writing organization. So, what is the answer?

I've found it's up to the individual writer.

Ugh! I know. Not what you were hoping to hear. Let me explain.

When I first started writing, I didn't want to tell anyone in case I failed. I quickly found that was an isolated place and I had no way of knowing if my writing was crap or the next New York Times bestseller. When I first heard about a local critique group, I thought this was what I needed to help me with my writing; after all, they were writers too. I was so wrong. I walked away from my first and only meeting with my muse cut to shreds.

When I found the courage to try this again, I went to someone who read in the genre I was writing in. This person gave me the honesty I was looking for along with some tact. The suggestions she made were simple and to the point. Because of this, I still use her help today.

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Later on, at the suggestion of an agent, I paid hundreds of dollars for the advice from a freelance editor. When I look back at that experience now, I know my critique partner would have done just as good a job, without charging me a months pay.

Over the years, I've participated in several different critique groups. Some have worked, while others have bombed just as badly as my first experience. During this time, I was lucky to find a fellow writer through my local writing chapter that I feel comfortable working with still today.

But those first attempts were not all a waste of time. Through trial and error, I've found I don't work best face to face with someone. When given criticism, I have to mull their suggestion over in my head before I can accept them. Because my partners and I handle this via e-mail, I don't have to explain my hesitation to some suggestions right away. Also, I'm better at writing down my ideas on their work, instead of trying to vocalize them face to face.

With the many miles separating me and both my critique partners, we exchange chapters via e-mail. We make our suggestions (according to informal rules we've established) and send them back in this same format. We've used many of the suggestions Tammy Schubert gives in her monthly articles, *Befriending the Big Hairy Beast*, printed in GRW's on-line newsletter, **The Galley**.

This process has been a God send for me. After years of struggling, I have two people I can trust to give me the feedback I need. Of course, this may not work well for

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everyone. That's why I say it's up to the individual writer. My purpose for this article is to let everyone know they have options; whether it's one on one help, a group, or even paying for services. There are plenty of people willing to step up and help.

If you aren't sure where to begin in this area, check out the December 2006 RWR where Kristen Painter writes about published authors and critique groups. Or check out Stephanie Bond's website. She wrote an article for **The Galley** on this very subject back in 2003. If you're still hunting for information, Google writing critique groups and check out some of the thousands of sites with information in any genre you may be looking for.

Another place for information on critique partners or groups is your local writing chapter. Most of the writers in my chapter are more than willing to step up and help you find your niche. A list of people looking for critique partners is available to GRW members on our website. I'm sure other chapters have something similar to this in place.

I hope this information has helped, if only a little. For more in-depth information, check out my blog at www.tamibrothers.com in January for a four-part series on critique partners. I'll be more than happy to try to answer any questions you may have.

Happy writing everyone!

If you are interested in more information on critique partners, check out my January 2008 blog at www.tamibrothers.com for an in-depth discussion on this subject.