

# Receiving Feedback in a Writing Workshop

## Before the workshop

- Double-space all drafts, with one inch margins all around.
- Your name should appear on the first page.
- Give your drafts titles, even if they are only working titles.
- Number the pages in your drafts.
- When you submit the work, you may want to mention what stage the work is in—early draft, a revision, a work you are hoping to publish soon.

## During the workshop

### Do not...

- Apologize
- Explain your intentions
- Interrupt a reader's response

### Do...

- Make notes on your copy as people are talking
- Ask for specific feedback, especially if a portion of the work gave you trouble
- Collect and save written feedback
- Wait for a while before you revise

### Consider the following:

- If the feedback rings true, confirms your own misgivings, or makes you see something new, revise accordingly.
- If your readers disagree, note those disagreements; decide about them later.
- If most of your readers agree, but you disagree, give them their due; they might be right.
- Look for patterns in feedback that may shed light on your writing as a whole.
- Remember that the reader who gives you feedback is also taking a risk.

## Outside the workshop

- Move through a cycle of revisions. Begin with the big picture; focus on editing later.
- Try to get distance from your work:
  - Change the layout or typeface before you reread.
  - Read your work aloud or have it read aloud to you. Listen for where a reader falters.
- Cut what you must, but save your best material.
- Keep earlier drafts because they're sometimes better.
- Study the revisions of other writers; read their comments about revision.

# Giving Feedback in a Writing Workshop

## Written feedback

- Read each work twice before summarizing your feedback.
- Write at least half a page of comments on each writer's submission.
- Begin your feedback with a brief description of the central focus in the piece (consider beginning by stating "the heart of the piece").
- Note the writer's strengths, even when you've mentioned them before. Writers learn from knowing what they do well.
- Identify areas where you see potential for development.
- Point to sections that confuse you; explain why you are confused.
- In nonfiction work, refer to the "narrator," not "you." (The writer's persona is distinct from the person who has written the piece.)
- Focus first on larger issues.
- You don't have to cover every feature of the writing, and you don't have to say it all in this workshop.

## Written and oral feedback: Other guidelines and suggestions

- Begin oral feedback by explaining what works.
- Respect the writer's aims. Enter as fully as possible the work you're given. Ask the writer to clarify aims, if you aren't sure of them.
- Determine the state of the draft and let that guide your priorities for feedback.
- Note successful passages as models.
- Explain your reactions. "I don't find that credible because..." or "I found this section appealing because..."
- Don't belabor a point.
- Be aware of your own tastes and preferences; mention them if they are relevant.
- Sometimes little or no feedback is best. Discourage revision when the writer needs to finish.
- Consider getting feedback on your feedback. To develop your skills as a reader of other people's work is to improve as a writer.