****

**How Mid-World Arts Writers' Group Works**

So you've decided to join Mid-World Arts. Good. There are other writing groups, but many tend to fall into particular modes. There's the social group, with the primary goal, stated or otherwise, of providing opportunities for members to get together and have fun. Writing is optional. There's the Learn to Write group, which concentrates on writing prompts and other short-term assignments to help writers develop their skills, and there's the support group, where writers get together, read each other's work, and tell one another how great they are. Mid-World Arts is of the rarer variety; it's focused on preparing your work for actual publication.

**Philosophy of the Critique Process**

At Mid-World, we make each other better writers. We critique work for the purpose of rooting out problems that may hurt a story's chances with editors, publishers, or agents. We may comment on the great stuff that appears in any piece, but, really, the good stuff will take care of itself. We focus on finding the problems. This sometimes unnerves authors. We will red-ink the daylights out of a critique submission if that's what it needs. We are not, as they say, a "critique sandwich" where we offer an attaboy for every problem we find. Instead, we tell you the truth as we see it. We don't attack authors or their works, but we tell the truth. Sometimes that truth has a glow to it; more often, that truth kind of stings. Better the sting come from us than as a rejection from one of the gatekeepers of publication.

**Mechanics of the Critique Process**

The group meets most **Tuesday nights at 7:30PM, Eastern time**. Every fourth meeting or so, we get together in person on Sundays at 3:30pm. Our Tuesday night meetings are held online over the Zoom video conference app. Meetings rarely go past 9:00PM and usually wind down around 8:30PM. At the end of each meeting, we decide who will submit work for critique the next week. Only two works will be chosen, and you pretty much have to be there to get your work chosen. I say "pretty much" because members of good standing can request a critique slot even if they can't make the meeting, and they'll probably get it. It pays to participate.

If you receive a slot to submit, prepare your work. **We critique anything.** We usually get fiction of some slice or the other, but we've critiqued blog entries, memoirs, histories, operator manuals, plays, poems, and once we critiqued the narrative portion of a software program. Good writing is good writing. It doesn't matter what it is.

**Follow These Guidelines to Prepare Your Work**

1. Submit your work in MS Word format (.doc, .docx, .rtf, .txt. Presented in order of preference.) If necessary, you can submit as PDF, but I wouldn't recommend it. These format preferences are for your benefit. If you insist on submitting a Pages document or something strange from an open source program, you may be disappointed to find no one could open the document. You can use whatever software you want, but present the work in the formats listed, .doc or .docx if at all possible. *If your word processor cannot display MS Word Track Changes or Comments data, ask in the front matter for the submission that group members not use those tools to critique your work.*
2. Encrypt your submission. That is, have your software scramble it so that it can only be opened with a password. Submit both an encrypted and an unencrypted version of the submission to Steve, the group leader, via email attachment. Include the password in the body of the email. Steve's email address is **stephanloy@yahoo.com**. This is to protect your work from pilfering by, well, anybody, but particularly by AI-training, data stealing major tech companies. You can encrypt documents from within Microsoft Word. We have a document on our Resources web page that takes you through a step-by-step on doing so.
3. Your work should weigh in at 3000 words or less. If you go a little over, don't worry about it. If you crack the 4000 word point, or get close to it, do worry, and cut some off. This 3000-word limit may be fine for a poem, blog, or short story, but certainly not a novel. If you want to submit a novel, do so over a period of time, 3000 words at a time. *If you need front matter, like special instructions to the team members or recaps of the story so far, or whatever, this does not count toward your word count limit.*
4. Make sure **your name and email address** are somewhere on the document. Putting it in a header is a good idea.
5. Numbering the pages will make your critique go smoother.
6. **Submit your work by midnight on the Saturday** before the Tuesday session. If Sunday morning comes around and you haven't sent Steve your work, that slot will be filled by someone else. In that event, you have dibs to submit your piece for the following critique session. We do this in order to ensure a full docket of submissions. There have been weeks where only one of two works were ever uploaded.
7. **If the meeting is on a Sunday,** send your submission by midnight on Thursday. Don't submit for a Sunday session unless you can be there in person. We'll always try to have a Zoom window open for those who can't make the Sunday in-person meetings, but that always depends on Internet access.
8. If you are scheduled to critique, critique those who are scheduled. Nobody likes a person who takes, but doesn't give.

**Follow These Guidelines**

**When Critiquing the Work of Others**

Generally, this is how most prefer you to critique their work. Download their document, then use the **Track Changes** function and **Comments** function of MS Word to insert comments, corrections, and changes. Then send the annotated file to them via email. Come to the meeting and join the discussion, orally pointing out the most important findings of your critique. If other folks have comments similar to yours and offer them first, chime in anyway. Authors want to know not only what members see as problematic in their work, they want to see how *many* members agree. If only one person has a particular concern, maybe it isn't a concern at all. Or maybe it is. Information is important.

What do you say in a critique? Follow your strengths. If you want to correct spelling and grammar, go to it. If you prefer to analyze things like theme, characterization, or story structure, go for it. Whatever impressions stick with you, those are the impressions the author wants to hear about. Don't be shy.

One caution: don't attempt to re-write the story to your liking or style. This isn't your work or your vision.

If the submission you read for critique is part of a chapter from the middle of a novel, no problem. You don't have to critique the rest of the novel, just that submission. There will be zero problems if you form an impression of chapter 27 that you might not have formed if you had read chapters 1-26. We understand that happens.

If the submission for critique is something you do not feel qualified to discuss (maybe it's a scientific paper or an epic poem in a particular ancient style, presented partly in Gaelic), then, please, just do your best. You may not understand theoretical fluid system nuclear physics, but you can sure tell when an author isn't being clear.

If you find something that offends you, critique it anyway and be fair. The piece may not be written for the likes of you. Your particular politics or religion isn't the point here. The sensitivities of the target audience are. The exception here is porn. If somebody feels they need a splash of porn in their work, they should warn the group in the front matter of their submission. It's a great idea to highlight that section in a different color font. You don't have to read porn if you don't want to. But you should critique the rest of the piece.

**In Conclusion:**

Find work to critique at:

<https://www.smloy.net/submissions> or click the **Submissions** button on the main page of our website.

Submit work to critique to Stephan Loy at stephanloy@yahoo.com, **and by Saturday night**

**3000 word limit, MS Word format**

If you submit for critique, critique those who submit

Have a great time honing your writing skills and helping your fellow writers improve theirs!