

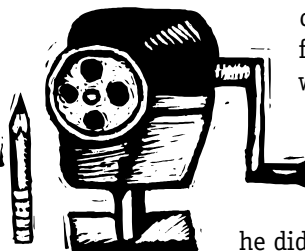
# How to Offer & Respond to Manuscripts

## To offer a manuscript to the group for response:

- ❑ Sign up with the moderator. No more than two members may pass out manuscripts at any meeting. Preference will be given on a first-come basis, or to those offering a manuscript the FIRST time.
- ❑ Prepare manuscript according to format.
- ❑ Limit to five pages of poetry or 10 pages of prose.
- ❑ Make enough copies for everyone in the group.
- ❑ Place a copy on each group member's chair during break. (At your discretion, mail a copy to anyone absent.)

## To respond to another person's manuscript in writing:

- ❑ Always use a regular pencil because it can be erased yet it stands out from the type. **ABSOLUTELY NO RED PENCILS, PENS OR COLORED MARKERS.**
- ❑ Write your name on the back.
- ❑ Respond to all work as fiction, even if it's written in first person. All writers draw from their lives, but we come to writers group to get feedback on the writing, not on our lives. Refer to the "I" in a first-person story as the narrator and other characters by name, not with personal pronouns that imply they are the writer or actual people (e.g., say "the mother," not "your mother").
- ❑ Read each manuscript through at least twice. On the first read, mark typos or grammatical problems, along with places you had a question or got confused. Read for content the second time through.
- ❑ Before making additional written comments, take a few days to think about the piece, then go back and mark in the text what you found memorable, especially vivid, or well done.
- ❑ If you had questions, or if you thought something needed clarification, transition or further rendering, indicate that in as specific and positive a way as you can. Instead of "cliche" or "tired," write, "Is there a fresher way to say this?"
- ❑ Before you write something critical, think how you'd feel reading it on your own work. No one is asked to lie, but under no circumstances will thoughtless and cruel manuscript comments be tolerated. You could be asked to leave the workshop.
- ❑ If you know a good place for this piece of writing to



be placed for publication, suggest it in a brief summary of your overall impression of the piece.

- ❑ Bring the manuscript with your comments to the next meeting and be prepared to discuss. Return it to the author when we finish. It is inappropriate to keep another person's manuscript. If absent the week a manuscript is discussed, return it to the person at the next meeting or mail it.
- ❑ Always participate in providing written response if you expect others to provide it for you.

## To respond to another person's manuscript in discussion:

- ✍ Follow all the guidelines listed for responding in writing. Most basic of all, remember that no one gets to criticize unless they first praise.
- ✍ If you liked things already mentioned by others, mention them again. The writer needs to know when readers agree, just as when they disagree.
- ✍ Don't be afraid to disagree with another reader. A piece of writing is bound to affect every reader a little differently. Writers benefit from understanding all the nuances of meaning their words engender.
- ✍ Realize that if you never speak, other group members may feel you judge them silently. This could work against community.

## When your manuscript is discussed:

- ✍ At the opening of discussion read a portion of your work—one poem or a page of prose of your choice.
- ✍ During the initial phase of the discussion try to remain silent and listen carefully. You'll get the best feedback if you allow the group to work as if you weren't there. For instance, one reader may say she was confused in one part, but four others may clarify it for her. Or one reader may say he didn't think a character would have acted a particular way, but three others may disagree. If you, as the writer, speak up and clarify or otherwise engage readers, you'll shortcut the process and never truly learn what happened when you released this piece of writing to this audience.
- ✍ When the moderator wraps up discussion (after about 20 minutes), you may then respond. Clarify if needed, and thank everyone for their input.
- ✍ Collect your marked-up manuscripts.
- ✍ Realize that nothing said or written about your work is anything more than one person's subjective opinion. You are the best judge about what comments, if any, to heed.