

Media Release

Critical Friendships in Writing – A way around the cost of an independent edit

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Managing Director, Hawkeye Publishing, Carolyn Martinez, said new writers should endeavour to establish critical friendships with writing peers.

“New writers should never submit a book to a publisher and say things like ‘my Mum loved it, or my kids laughed out loud,” Mrs Martinez said.

“Publishers are looking to see evidence that writers have had their book independently edited and reviewed by industry peers.”

“First impressions count, and good editing leaps from the page.”

Mrs Martinez said that writers, especially new writers, can get too close to their work to accept and act upon constructive criticism.

“Early in the writing journey, professional writers get past the need to only hear positive reinforcement about their work. Good writers know the value of a critical review. It is impossible to effectively write, review, edit, and proof your own writing.”

“Every writer must do all of these things as a matter of course, but the next step in the process is to have an independent person/people also perform the review, edit and proof process.”

“One way of circumventing the cost of this is to establish a critical friendship through writing groups – in the community or as part of your university course. You offer to review a peer’s work for them, and they for you.”

Mrs Martinez offered these tips for being a valuable reviewer to your critical friend:

- A writer learns just as much by hearing about what works, as by hearing about what needs improvement. When you review a peer’s work, make sure you include both.
- Ask the writer to pose a set of open-ended questions concerning aspects of their work that they wish to receive information on eg. I ask my reviewer things such as ‘can you describe the type of person the main character is?’ Their description then tells me if I have portrayed my main character in the manner I intended, or if I need to do more work on building my character.
- Put aside your red pen in the first reading. We learn so many things as writers – do this, don’t do that. But what makes a great writer to begin with is uniqueness, and the ability

to bring a story alive in such a way that the reader is transported. Sometimes one has to forget the rules and simply feel the story they are reviewing.

- The second read will be to fix any grammar and spelling mistakes. Personally, I have to do this early or I find myself distracted by the mistakes when trying to concentrate on something else.
- Comment on the opening. Did the opening grab your attention and make you want to read on? Are there other sections in the piece that are better than the opening (meaning that this author has the ability to achieve a better opening than they already have)?
- Was the main plot believable? Did the story start at the right place? Did the story end at the right place? Are there any scenes which do not seem to further the plot?
- For fiction, is there enough emotional conflict within and between characters for the story to be interesting, or too much conflict? For non-fiction, has the author drawn enough emotion for you to care about their subject matter?
- Is there too much or not enough description of the setting? Were you convinced that the characters in that time and place would act in the way described?
- Did the people seem real? Was there back story, change, growth, challenge?
- Was the dialogue consistent with the personalities? Was there too much or not enough dialogue?
- Were there too many viewpoints in the story? Did the choice of point of view work?
- Was there too much abstract language where specific details would have made a greater impact on the reader? Was there too much description and not enough dialogue?
- Was it easy to read, too long, too short?
- Was the story successfully furthered through action? Were there any sections told as description which could have been better demonstrated through action?
- Each piece is individual, and some questions relate to one but not another, however, also provide to the author comment on who you thought the main character was, the intention of the work, musicality of the imagery, visuals you imagined while reading, who you believe the audience would be, and how pleasing you found the title, chapter and section headings. Such comment might enable the author to evaluate if their sentences were read the way they intended.

Lastly, Mrs Martinez cautioned writers giving their critical friend a review to imagine themselves in the place of the person receiving their review.

“Writing can be like displaying oneself buck naked in a crowded shopping centre. I see my role as critiquer to inform the author what I loved best, and what didn’t resonate with me as well ... diplomatically and respectfully.”

“The best advice I can give is to prepare, along with your critical friend, a list of questions you will each answer in your reviews. If you’ve thoughtfully compiled the list, it should contain around forty questions or more.”