

# The Art of The Critique (Part 2)

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Part 2 in a series of Several - Getting Meaningful Critiques.

OK, you're sold on the need for getting Critiques. Well, maybe. How do I get my work Critiqued? I hear you ask. (I have an active imagination, OK?)

Well, there are many and varied paths to that end. The place not to start is with your friends and family. While it is always nice to get pleasant feedback, your friends and family are unlikely to give an unbiased critique. They know you. Assumably they like you. The most you are likely to get is "I thought it was pretty good" or "Well, I couldn't really get into it."

The obvious exception to this is if your friends and/or family are writers themselves. Then you might start getting the sort of serious feedback you need.

What should I look for in a Critiquer?

A good critiquer is a goldmine to an author. A good critiquer will not only say what they thought was wrong with your story, but will often be able to point out ways to improve it. As previously mentioned, it can be a painful process -- a negative critique can ruin your whole day -- but the pain is worth it in the end.

Finding a good critiquer -- an experienced author or editor who is willing to take the time to go over your work with a fine toothed comb -- can be difficult. I lucked out early in that I already knew Carole Nomarhas. She had a tendency to tear my work to pieces and then tell me how to put it back together again. Very painful, and, in my early days, rather offputting. When I got serious about writing, though, girded my loins, gritted my teeth, and did the hard yards to implement the suggestions, I was very pleased with the results. So: The pain is worth it.

There are quite a few places you can get good critiques, though. One place is through the CSFG - we have a Critiquing Circle in place, and it seems to be doing good stuff. Contact [Stuart Barrow](#) for details.

Most writers' organizations have critiquing groups of some kind or another.

Keep an eye out for Writers Workshops ... quite a few places run them, including the [ACT Writers Centre](#). Or, if getting to meetings and going face to face is too hard to arrange -- and it can be very difficult -- there are numerous online groups.

My favourite is 'Critters'. It can be found at <http://www.critters.org> It costs nothing to join, and is very well organized. The only rule is that to receive critiques, you must give critiques. Generally, in exchange for perhaps three critiques of your own, you usually get 20 or 30 back. It takes about a month (typically) for your story to work its way through the queue. Critters is specifically for Spec Fic: SF, Fantasy, and Horror.

There are other groups out there. (Suggestions from anyone?) All you have to do is look.

Which brings us to another issue: Quality vs Quantity. Ideally, what you need is one or two critiquers whose judgement you trust, and whose style fits with your own. If you can't get that ... or even if you can ... Quantity is good too.

Every Critique you receive is only the opinion of the Critiquer. Their suggestions may or may not take your story in a direction you want to go. They may not like (eg) Horror. They may not be able to write for peanuts.

However... if you can get a lot of Critiques, generally a pattern emerges. If one person says that the combat at the end was too rushed, then you may safely ignore that if you wish. If 20 people say it, well, there may be a point.

With short stories, to a large degree, the more critiques you can get, the better.

The other issue with quantity is that it gives you a much better feel for the audience reaction to your story. There is no such thing as 100% approval. I don't believe it is possible to write a story that everyone likes unreservedly. 80% is doing pretty good, actually.

Some people can be pretty harsh with their Critiques as well. It can hurt. But the pain is usually worth it, if you can pick your battered self-respect up off the floor and go on to produce a better

story.

Next: [How to Critique....](#)