

Helpful Resource Books for Writing and Critique Groups

Review by Marcia Ehinger

The Writing Group Book: Creating and Sustaining a Successful Writing Group, edited by Lisa Rosenthal.

This book is fun and easy to read. Each chapter is the story of a specific writing group. The information is helpful, but it is ©2003, so some of the websites cited may no longer be active. The first chapter tells the editor's story of starting a critique group from scratch. The participants write children's literature, and the chapter was written after the group's third year. One group is a playwrights' collective. Another group consists of successful screenwriters 2,000 miles from Hollywood. One timely chapter features a collaboration started by a working mom who wanted to interact online. She includes good lists with specific tips about running an online group and doing critiques. There is a poetry group, and a group that rescued several members from despair through their writing and discussions. Participants in Tel Aviv were excited by their members' reactions when an author tried writing in a genre new to her. Sailing the cyber seas, one crew of adventurous writers used the metaphor of a pirate ship for their members and messaging, as well as for a party break. The book ends with reasons why groups flourish or fizzle – wise words for all.

The Writing & Critique Group Survival Guide: How to Give and Receive Feedback, Self-Edit, and Make Revisions, by Becky Levine

This is a textbook or workbook for a dedicated group or their leader. It has very detailed information about creating a group, holding meetings, and submitting material. It also goes into depth about recognizing and analyzing the weaknesses in various types of writing: magazine articles, various genres of fiction, and non-fiction. It includes a number of worksheets -- a class within a book.

The Art of Memoir, by Mary Karr (New York Times bestseller, recommended by John Patterson and our President Kim Edwards)

This is a popular book in memoir writing classes by a well-known writer. It is used as a textbook for writing, but includes the author's own story and critiques of her previous books. It helps you learn how to write better as she goes through the process of "unpacking" or deconstructing her own works. One critic said that it should be called "The Art of Living". Another described the sudden unpacking that takes place as similar to circus clowns pouring out of a miniature car.

Shimmering Images: A Handy Little Guide to Writing memoir, by Lisa Dale Norton
(recommended by our September 2020 presenter, Kakwasi Somadhi)

This book helps you to focus on your own story, and starts with some helpful definitions, such as “Memoir versus Autobiography”. It is relatively short, with chapters that are to the point. The book is divided into three sections. Part 1 talks about ideas behind writing a memoir. Part 2 introduces shimmering images – the magic key to everything. Then, it charts a simple step-by-step process for narrowing your focus, capturing your most powerful stories, and using them to construct your framework. Part 3 is a quick look at the craft of writing, the tools that will help you hone your memoir.

(Also, take a look at the book list on page 12, middle, October 2020 newsletter, especially [Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing & Life](#) by Anne Lamott) www.cwcsacramentowriters.org