

HOW TO BUILD A **STORY**

A Guide to Giving Useful Feedback to Writers

A lot of us feel shy about giving feedback on someone else's writing. We're afraid that we'll sound mean or judgmental. We don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. But most of all? We're afraid we don't know what we're talking about.

The good news is, anyone with decent reading skills can give valuable feedback. You're not passing judgment on the story; you're just letting the author know where you had questions or got confused, as well as what you enjoyed about the story. Simply put, giving feedback is simply giving a report on your reading experience.

Start by reading the piece from beginning to end. Then read it a second time, this time noting the following things:

The Opening.

Did the opening pull you in? Did it make you want to keep reading? If so, what was it about the beginning that got your interest? The action? The voice? The description? The suspense? Be as specific as you can!

If the beginning didn't pull you in, can you explain why not? What's missing? At what point did you get interested in the story?

The Protagonist.

What did you think about the main character? Is s/he someone you want to get know better? What did you like about this character? What's interesting, unusual or unique about them?

The Conflict.

In every story, the main character has a problem that needs to be solved. What is the main character's problem here? Did it seem realistic to you? Did you understand why it was a problem?



The Ending.

Did the ending feel satisfying to you? If so, why? If not, can you say why not?

The Writing.

Where do you think the writer is having the most fun? How can you tell? Where do you think the writer might have been struggling? How can you tell?

The Clarity.

Make a list of questions about things you found confusing or need to know more about. Did you understand the characters' actions and motivations? Was it clear to you when and where the story takes place, the ages of the characters, the relationships of the characters to one another, etc.?

written by **Frances O'Roark Dowell**

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