

HOW TO BUILD A **STORY**

How to Start Your Own Writing Group

Meeting with other writers is a great way to motivate yourself to write and to get feedback on your writing. Admittedly, it can also be a good way to get your feelings hurt, but a writer has to be able to take constructive criticism. Consider it an occupational hazard of the trade.

So where do you start? With other writers, of course. Here are a few pointers for how to put together a group that will make your sentences sing and your stanzas shout.

Keep it small.

Four or five writers, tops, ought to do it. A smaller group helps to foster trust among all involved — and if you're going to show the outpourings of your heart to a group of people, you need to trust them to respect your words and treat them with care.

Meet regularly.

These are busy days for a lot of people and once a week may be too much of a commitment to ask for. Still, a weekly meeting will keep everyone motivated. If you can't meet every week, try to meet at least once a month. And if you can do it every other week, even better.

Have an agenda.

Hammer out the ground rules at your first meeting. Will everyone get to read each meeting? Should you send copies of your work beforehand to each member, circulate copies at the meeting, or forget about copies altogether? Who will run the meetings? The same person each time? How long will each meeting last?



Establish a procedure for giving feedback.

In some groups, the author of a story or poem reads, then sits back silently and listens to everyone's response. In other groups, the author is allowed to comment on others' comments, ask questions, argue. A word to the wise: make it clear that personal attacks are never acceptable — it's the work that's under discussion, not the author.

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