

Ground Rules for Forming Peer Groups

1. **First rule:** Make it work for you.

Some groups only critique; some use a prompt (see <https://meredithsuewillis.com/writingexercises.html>) and actually write together for half an hour. Some have every member read/present every session; others only when someone is in need of responses. Some eat together; some use zoom or skype. Some read aloud; some insist that things be distributed in advance. Try various things to see what works for your group, but make sure everyone agrees.

My writers group meets every two weeks at someone's home with pizza or sandwiches and wine. We follow the academic year and don't meet in the summer. We do whatever members need: read in advance, read aloud with copies, read with no copies.

We begin with a go-round just to see how everyone's writing is going, or other aspects of their lives.

Our responses are fairly informal and individual, but we've been working together for many years.

2. **For a newly forming group**, I'd strongly suggest somewhat more rigid rules till everyone is comfortable: for example, make a stable time; avoid hospitality (cooking meals for the group!); send work in advance; presenter is silent till everyone else has had a say; fairly strict time limits. One good idea is an evaluation-discussion at the end of the first few sessions to take stock of what went well, what could be improved. After a few sessions, maybe 3, when people who are going to drop out have done it, maybe loosen up, or maybe not. Rules are made to be changed, and even broken, but they help hold things together too.

4. In absence of a teacher, be sure everyone gets a turn.

5. **How many members:** You probably need at least 5 people. If everyone is committed and works hard, you can do it with 3, of course, but the reason for a group is the ideas of several people. And there will inevitably be absences and turnover.

6. **Two people aren't a group, but** if you find someone you like to work with, you can work as a pair: share manuscript pages, even go to a coffee shop (someday!) or library, and write together. See Anna Smucker's piece in the Journal of Practical Writing <https://www.meredithsuewillis.com/practical%20writing.html#deadlines>

7. Be aware that some people may not work out. You yourself may decide you don't want to continue. Possibly begin with a finite number of sessions then reorganize. Try to keep it professional. If you invite new people, start with some kind of agreement for two or three sessions before everyone re-evaluates.

8. More ideas?