How to Start a Writer’s Group

By Eila Algood

Where

* Choose a location that is easily accessible to the public
* Hawaii State Public Library
* Community Organization
* I like having meetings at North Kohala Public Library and Tutu’s House in Waimea because they provide publicity.

Purpose

* To support one another’s writing by sharing unpublished work; giving and receiving feedback.

Format of meeting

* Greeting and welcome
* Introduction:
1. If plenty of time, have each person share what brought them to the group (2 minutes each).
2. If not plenty of time, have each person say their name.
* Each participant:
1. Reads the written piece they are working on.
2. They have 10-15 minutes for reading AND feedback
3. Bring a piece of writing they are working on (up to 3 typed pages) and copies for others to read and make comments (up to 8 copies)
* If 30 minutes left at end of readings, encourage people to write during that time.
* Once everyone has read, meeting can end.

Facilitation of a group

* As the facilitator, you set the tone and keep it on time.
* Create a space of respect and kindness.
* It’s important that each person is able to share and no one runs away with the group.
* Limit conversation to writing.
* If someone goes off topic, gently remind them this is a writing group and they can talk more about that after the meeting.

How long

* 2 hours maximum

Time of Day and Day of Week; Choose based on:

* Your availability as a facilitator,
* When public space is available and
* When attendees may be available.

FAQ

What if we have 16 people who want to read in our 2 hour group?

* In my experience, it’s best to limit to the first 10 people who arrive (you can have a sign up list). Cramming in more reduces the quality of feedback for everyone.

What if we have 4 people for a 2 hour meeting?

* Give each person 15 minutes. Then ask the group if they want to stay longer to talk about something relating to writing (ie: publishing), or would they like to write for 30 minutes, or do they want to end the meeting early? Reminder – this is a writers group so writing during your time together makes sense.

How often should meetings be?

* That depends on your availability as a facilitator and the availability of the space. I’ve facilitated in a weekly group, a twice a month group and a once a month group. The answer resides with you.

What if I cannot lead the group one week?

* Gather email addresses from participants at each meeting and look for someone who you could ask to fill in for you.

Do I charge money for meetings?

* The writers groups I’ve been involved with do not charge money.

Do I have to pay for space?

* It is best if you don’t. I have found my local library or community association to offer free space especially if I’m not charging participants.

Do I need to send email reminders prior to each meeting?

* That’s up to you. It can help participants to have a reminder.