

Improvement through Writers' Workshop



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PLoP Community Culture

“the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations”

“the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a religious, or social group”

“the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes a company or corporation”

Merriam Webster Collegiate Dictionary
on the web <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary.htm>

- Shared experiences
- Shared rituals
 - Writers' Workshop
 - Shepherding
 - Gifting and Games



Writers' Workshops at PLoP



Writers' Workshops & the Work of Making Things...Richard Gabriel

A circle of interested colleagues, led by a strong, neutral moderator, that provides feedback to the author on how the pattern is understood by the group and suggestions for improvement

Roles:

- Author
- Moderator/Leader
- Summarizer
- Sympathetic Participants

Participants read the pattern before the workshop



The author stands, reads a selection from the pattern, then becomes a “fly on the wall,” outside the circle. No eye contact is made. The author’s name is never mentioned; use “the author”



<http://www.dreamsongs.com/Files/WritersWorkshop.pdf>

Writers' Workshop Outline (1)

- A summary of the pattern is discussed by the group
- Begin with positive comments
 - Say what the author had done well and should leave as it is
- Suggestions for improvement
 - State the opportunity along with the suggestion for improvement



Writers' Workshop Outline (2)

- **Don't speak for the author**
 - The pattern must stand on its own, don't assume intent
- **Leader focuses discussion to patterns at hand**
 - Constructive criticism, not attacking!!!
- **Trivial comments and typos can be made on a marked-up copy and given to the author after the workshop**



Writers' Workshop Outline (3)

- **End with positive closing comment or two**
- **Invite the author back into the inner circle**
- **The author thanks the group for the feedback/suggestions**
- **Author asks questions to clarify comments from the group**
- **Participants give marked up papers to the author**

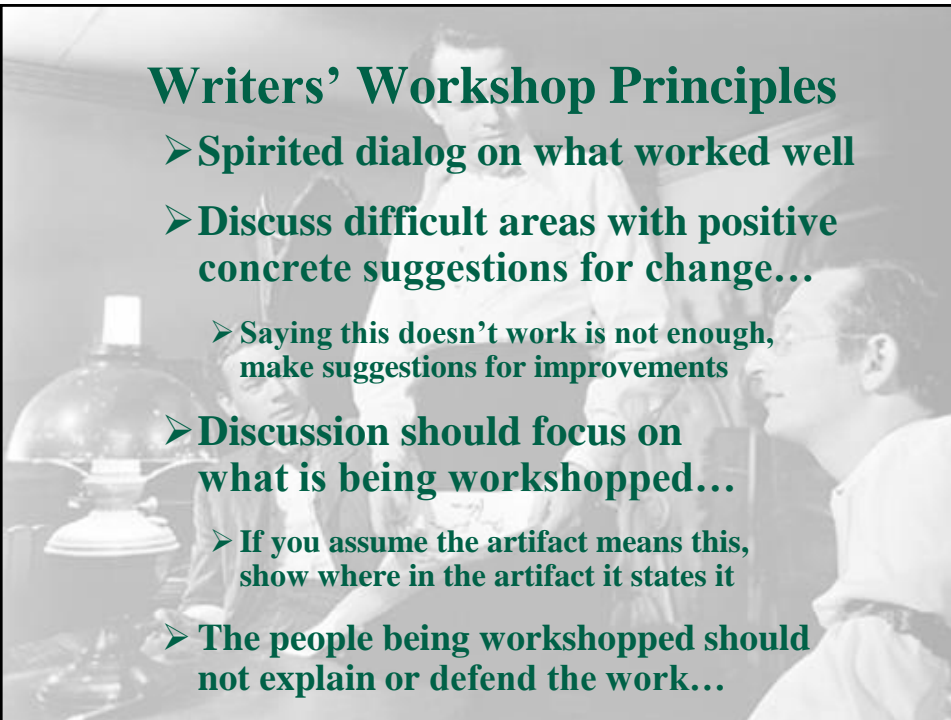
Questions to the Author

- Overall intent of this paper
- What is the intended audience
- Is this part of something bigger
- Are there specific areas where you would like us to focus



Writers' Workshop Principles

- Spirited dialog on what worked well
- Discuss difficult areas with positive concrete suggestions for change...
 - Saying this doesn't work is not enough, make suggestions for improvements
- Discussion should focus on what is being workshopped...
 - If you assume the artifact means this, show where in the artifact it states it
- The people being workshopped should not explain or defend the work...



Useful for Many Things

- ✓ prose, poetry, plays, fiction, nonfiction, lyrics
- ✓ technical papers, patterns, pattern languages, scientific papers
- ✓ art, painting, sculpture, photography, musical compositions
- ✓ live performances, music performances, songs, demonstrations, lectures & talks, video, films
- ✓ meetings, product launches, company structure, business plans
- ✓ software, user interfaces
- ✓ designs and devices of all kinds



Giving, and Responding to Advice

Improving Your Writing

- Get people read to your work and give you comments
- Don't wait until it is finished to do so
- Find trusted reviewers and friends to help, too
- Write clearly:
 - Shorten long sentences.
 - Eliminate extra words
 - Summarize main points
- Practice. Revise. Get help to improve
 - writing skills
 - understandable problem and solution
 - clear tradeoffs

Focus on Your Reader

- Know your intended audience
 - what can you assume that they already know?
 - what details do they need explained in detail?
 - how much detail do you need to include?
 - what form best keeps their interest?
- Keep your intended readers in mind
- Explain who your intended audience is in your paper and to your reviewers and shepherd

How do I revise my patterns?

- What do I do with shepherds comments?
- What do I do after a writers' workshop?
- How much revision should I do?
- When should I stop?

The Role of Participants: Guide, Supporter, Mentor

Reads, reviews, advises

- An experienced writer
- Works with the author to improve their paper
 - Offers constructive advice
 - Has definite opinions
 - Suggests improvements
 - Guides, does not dictate or demand
- Offers encouragement!



Giving Advice: Consider Its Impact



Adapt a “triage” approach

- Read and note issues/questions/concerns
- Spend time wisely:
 - Address most important things first
 - Note minor issues
 - Don't spend time on hopeless causes (if it is really, really bad)
- Be sure to mention what you like, too!

The Role of a Pattern Author: Effectively Share Wisdom

Writes, thinks, rewrites

- Conceives of the pattern
- Writes (you are the author)
- Agrees to receive feedback
- Receives and responds to advice (open minded)
- Asks for help
- Asks clarifying questions
- Rewrites
 - Seeks to communicate clearly and compellingly



Types of Advice

- **Valid**—There is clearly a problem in my pattern I should address
“Your pattern is missing some forces”
- **Invalid**—The comment is not useful or valid
- **Judgmental**—The reviewer liked or disliked something
“The name of your pattern doesn’t reflect the solution”
- **Complexity**—The reviewer thinks I should express my ideas more simply or that my solution is too complex
“Reword your solution and include a diagram to help explain”
- **Aesthetics**—A comment about the form, not the substance of my pattern “Can you add a rating to all your patterns?”
- **Praise**—The reviewer is happy. “This is much improved”

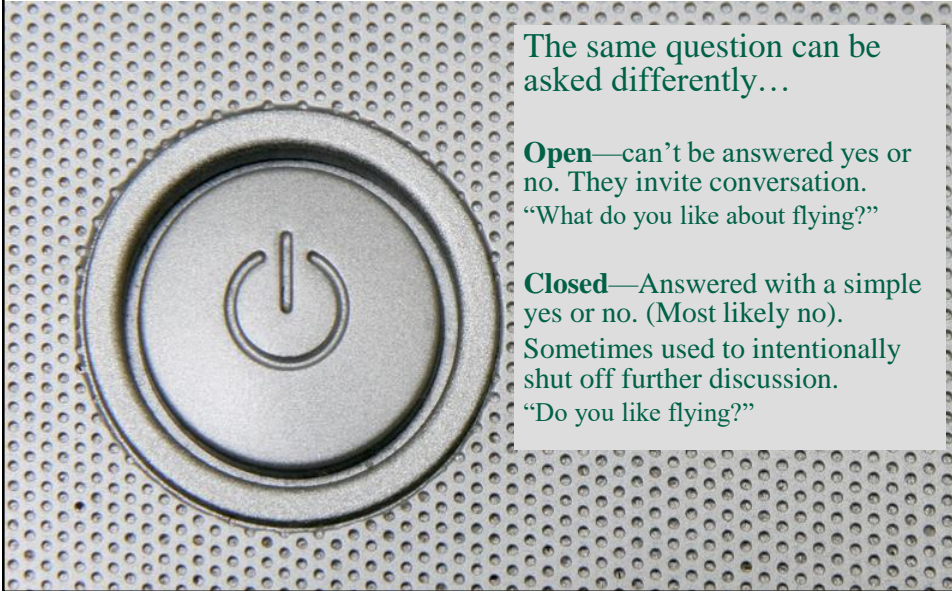


Responding To Constructive Advice

- You are in control of what to do with advice. Here’s how you might react and respond:
 - **Valid**—You need to improve your pattern. You may need to ask some questions before making changes.
 - **Invalid**—Most likely you ignore the comment (unless the shepherd or reviewer thought it was very important).
 - **Judgmental**—Ask them why they think that.
 - **Complexity**—May want to explain more clearly...or break down a complicated solution into alternatives or...maybe there is more than one pattern here.
 - **Aesthetics**—You decide whether to fix or ignore “style” issues.
 - **Praise**—You may want to know why they are so happy.
“What do you like about my new solution?”



Open and Closed Questions



The same question can be asked differently...

Open—can't be answered yes or no. They invite conversation.
“What do you like about flying?”

Closed—Answered with a simple yes or no. (Most likely no).
Sometimes used to intentionally shut off further discussion.
“Do you like flying?”

Probing Questions

- Evaluation...how good do you think it will be?
- Accuracy...how did you come up with those numbers?
- Completeness...is that all...is there more?
- Relevance...does this apply here?
- Purpose...why did you suggest that?
- Extension...tell me more, be concrete?



Clarifying Questions

- Get others to think:
 - Why do you say that?
 - What exactly do you mean?
 - Can you give me an example?
 - Are you saying ... or ... ?
 - Can you restate your concern?



Acknowledgements

- Richard Gabriel for feedback on Writers' Workshops
- Rebecca Wirfs-Brock bootcamp collaboration on ideas on giving and receiving good feedback
- <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Citizen-Kane-Declaration-of-Principles.jpg>



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Thanks ... Obrigado!!!



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