**You Can Write for Children: CRITIQUE GUIDELINES**

Compiled by Chris Eboch, [www.chriseboch.com](http://www.chriseboch.com)

**HOW TO OFFER A CRITIQUE:**

1. Always start with something that works.
2. Phrase criticism so it isn’t personal. When in doubt phrase your comment as a question.
3. Make broad suggestions, e.g., characters unclear, voice, audience issues.
4. Make specific suggestions, e.g., places that might be cut.
5. Don’t spend all your time line-editing—what if the entire scene or chapter gets cut? However, you can make minor “micro-editing” comments, e.g., word choice, grammar, if the writer asks for them or this is a edited draft.
6. Make suggestions that will bridge the gap between the author’s intent and what is on the page. Don’t try to turn the work into the story that you would write.
7. Don’t worry if your major point has already been made by someone else. It's helpful to know how many people agree or disagree with a suggestion. In the conversation, try to take that point deeper.

**HOW TO ACCEPT CRITIQUE:**

1. Free your mind and open your ears. Remain silent while your work is being discussed.
2. Remember this is not about you, it’s about the piece.
3. Assume your “listening posture” while you keep your hands busy. Write down comments.
4. Listen for the heart of what the critiquer says.
5. Listen to comments without argument; debate is not an effective use of our time.
6. You may ask follow-up questions afterward, but explain what you intended only if you're asking for help in getting there, not because you want to defend your work.

**HOW TO FOLLOW UP ON CRITIQUE:**

1. Take time to process suggestions. Resist the urge to immediately dismiss something, and don't rush to make changes before you've thoroughly considered them.
2. Think about the ramifications of changes, e.g., the impact on the entire piece.
3. Remain open to suggestions, but if you feel strongly about something, you do not need to make that change. However, try to understand what the critiquer intended and see if there's another answer.
4. Remember that revision is harder than writing and a manuscript has to be polished to sell.
5. First focus on getting the basic story structure right. Save polishing for when you have a well-crafted draft.

 More advice:

[The Vow of Silence](http://annewarrensmith.wordpress.com/2012/08/10/the-vow-of-silence/), from Anne Warren Smith:

[How to Critique and Still Have Friends](http://www.teachingauthors.com/2012/11/how-to-critique-and-still-have-friends.html) by Mary Ann Rodman from Teaching Authors.

**Critique Questions:** It takes time to learn how to give a good critique. Use these questions with your critique group—or on your own—to identify strengths and weaknesses in your stories. This list of questions is long, so the person getting a critique may need to focus on three to five questions they most want answered in this critique session.

1. Does the opening hook you? Why or why not?

2. Is the setting clear and specific? Is it carried throughout the story? Are the five senses used? Is there good use of imagery?

3. Is the main character believable, distinct, well-rounded and interesting? Does she/he have both weaknesses and strengths? Are her motives clear?

4. Does the hero have a clear problem, whether external, internal, or both? Does the hero actively work to solve his/her own problems? Does the hero resolve the conflict at the climax, or does the problem just disappear or some outside force take over?

5. Is the “villain” realistic, whether it's a person/creature (bully, monster, ghost), a situation (storm, pet dying), or an emotional flaw (selfishness)?

6. Are secondary characters believable, distinct, well-rounded and interesting?

Do they have both weaknesses and strengths?

7. Is the point of view clear and consistent? Is the reader part of the story or an outside observer? Does this work?

8. Is there a good balance between narrative description, action, and dialogue? Are there

summarized passages that should be written out as scenes?

Is the dialogue natural and convincing? Does each character speak in a unique, consistent voice? Does the dialog move the story forward?

9. Is the plot believable? Interesting? Any weaknesses? Is the conflict clear? Is the ending satisfying? Do the characters behave throughout in realistic ways?

10. What is the theme? Is it unclear, or too obvious? Is it carried throughout the piece? Is it appropriate for the audience?

11. Is the style fresh and unique? Is the language appropriate for the audience? Does the tone fit the subject? Is the pacing effective, with good scene transitions? Do emotional or humorous scenes evoke the right response?

12. Any technical errors—spelling, punctuation, grammar, etc.?

13. What are the story’s major strengths?

14. What are the story’s major weaknesses? Suggest ways to improve the story.