



CRITIQUELESS PARTNERS

SIX* CRITIQUE-FREE WAYS TO
ADD THE BUDDY SYSTEM TO YOUR
WRITING PROCESS.

By Anica Mrose Rissi

**Plus one bonus variation*



A good critique partner, one who reads your drafts and offers constructive feedback in order to help you revise – usually in exchange for your feedback on *their* drafts – can be an invaluable part of the writing process. But sometimes one barely has the time or brain space to ponder one’s own work, let alone to make thoughtful comments on someone else’s. And another set of eyes on the page is not always what a draft (or its author) needs.

If having or being a critique partner isn’t right for your process right now, that doesn’t mean you have to go it alone. Writing may appear to be a solitary sport, but it is immeasurably better with teammates. Here are six (plus) ways to support – and get support from – other writers without having to read or critique one another’s work.

Weekly or monthly write-ins

In person or via Zoom, get together with one or more friends for regularly scheduled writing sessions. Set aside time at the start of each write-in for quick updates on what you’re each working on – your goals for the day’s session and thoughts on where you are in the process. Share briefly, then get to work. Keep your commitments to one another *and* to the page.

Tip: Discuss and agree beforehand on a structure that works well for the group. Will you take breaks during which chatting is allowed or stay focused on work throughout the session? Will write-ins end at a set time or should each participant follow her own momentum? Will you debrief and share encouragements at the end or keep your sentences and progress to yourselves?

→ Variation: Prompt-based write-ins

At the start of each write-in, have someone in the group give a prompt. Choose one from the many offered on *The Writer’s* website or create one of your own. Pull a tarot card, read a poem, or share an image to set the mood and provide inspiration. Participants may use the prompt to start a new piece or apply it to a work in progress.

Regularly scheduled check-ins

Don’t want to write with other writers? Skip that part and gather for regular check-ins instead. Here’s how I do it: Every Thursday, three writer friends and I hop on Zoom to discuss what we’re working on that week. We talk through our daily intentions, share overarching plans, strategize, commiserate, celebrate one another’s triumphs, and offer regularly scheduled support. Sometimes we chat for 20 minutes. Sometimes we go on for over an hour. Even in weeks when I’m not writing, I show up and feel buoyed by the community and camaraderie and inspired by the creative energy and output of others. Our check-ins help me feel less alone in my process and in the highs, lows, and middle ground of my career.

Tip: You can stay committed to a group while remaining flexible in your approach to its structure. My check-in group started as a write-in group (one with optional prompts) before it morphed into its current form. Writing together worked well for us for a while, but when our needs changed, we revised the plan. Keep an open mind and be prepared to make adjustments, much like you'd do with a draft. The group, too, is a work in progress.

Goal-setting groups

Whether you set yearly, quarterly, or monthly writing goals, a goal-setting group or partner can help you refine, solidify, and amend your aspirations and feel empowered to tackle each one. Team up to list your goals and speak them out loud. Identify next steps, share resources, and ask questions. Celebrate accomplishments, mourn disappointments, and assess what's within your control and what's out of it. Acknowledge the path of those ever-shifting goalposts. Dream bigger – and more specifically – together.

Tip: For ideas on how to set and approach your writing goals, consult Louise DeSalvo's *The Art of Slow Writing*, especially Chapter 17, "Game Plan."

Accountability partners

Have a daily or weekly goal you're pursuing? Team up to make it happen.

Find a peer who shares a similar goal (or a goal with a similar schedule), set the parameters, and agree to report back on your progress. This

might mean texting your daily word count, checking in once you've queried a new agent each week, or confirming you took a solo Sunday walk to let your mind wander and daydream.

During a period when I found myself extra prone to distraction, I made a pact with a friend to write for 20 minutes each morning *before* we checked email, headlines, or social media. Each day that I succeeded, I texted her, "I did the thing!" Knowing that if I failed, I would not get to text triumphantly helped me meet the goal more often than I might have otherwise. Seeing her triumphant texts on mornings when she succeeded gave me an extra shot of joy – and motivation to match her the next day.

Tip: Your accountability partner doesn't have to be someone you know IRL (in real life). If you don't have a friend with whom it makes sense to pair up, put out a call for an accountability partner on Twitter or another social media platform. Use a hashtag such as #WritingCommunity to help your post get more views.

Support circles

Every writer needs a place to vent, find affirmation, share info, and seek the occasional reality check. You might have friends to whom you turn for those things already, but there are benefits to making a support group official and explicit and giving such conversations a designated space.

Invite a few trusted friends to join a text thread or group chat that's

specifically reserved for judgment-free writerly peer support. Set some basic ground rules, such as privacy expectations, any topics that might be off-limits, and whether feedback and advice are always welcome or should be offered only upon request. Listen generously, honestly, and with an open heart and mind. Lean on your fellow writers as needed.

Daily sentence swaps

Okay, for this one you *will* need to read another writer's work – but only one sentence per day and with no critiquing, just cheerleading.

Team up with a friend who's also drafting or revising and agree to send a single sentence a day: One sentence that you're proud of. One you hope will make your friend laugh or nod. Or simply the only sentence you wrote that day. (Hey, at least you wrote something.) Agree to keep your replies simple: "Ooooooh" or "YES" or perhaps nothing at all except your own daily sentence, then the next one, and the next.

When I do sentence swaps with a writing partner, I'm extra motivated to show up to the page, even if one sentence is all I produce. (That's still one more sentence than I had the day before, my friend reminds me. And it keeps my mind on the work.) It's a daily celebration as much as a daily task – a chance to share turns of phrase I'm proud of or breakthrough moments that finally happen. If later I must kill some of these darlings in revision, it's easier, knowing they were seen and had their moment. And tasting small, daily bites of my friend's draft is a fun, low-pressure way to support her. It keeps me moving forward in my work, cheered on by – and cheering for – others. 📖

Anica Mrose Rissi is the award-winning author of more than a dozen books for kids and teens, including Hide and Don't Seek: And Other Very Scary Stories and Love, Sophia on the Moon. Find her online at anicarissi.com and follow @anicarissi on Instagram and Twitter.



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