

**The Comedy Constructor Fleet
Guidelines & Rules
2012 Katherine Phelps**

Purposes & Goals

Our purpose is to form an effective body of dedicated and supportive writers and comedians who will meet on a regular basis. Our goals here are 1) to support one another in creating comic works of high quality, and 2) to support one another in our endeavours to become professional writers and performers.

Our Focus

Our focus is upon comic writing for standup, sketches, television, and film. We are primarily focused on works that are good-natured, lighthearted, imaginative, and insightful. Humour of a bullying nature will not be tolerated.

Benefits of Membership

- You will have real deadlines to work toward in completing your projects.
- You will have a group of people with a diversity of writing and comedy experience available for feedback on the quality of your work.
- As each member of this group generates more success for their work, they then become good sources of knowledge and a connection into the comedy world.
- You will be encouraged to perform your work and/or submit it for production.
- You will have people barracking for the success of your work.

Member Requirements

Members can be of any age. However, we are looking for skilled writer/performers. You are required to be dedicated to this endeavour, to produce work, to present that work to others, to take criticism, and also to give it.

Rules of Order

- Official positions within this group include: organiser, the person who arranges a venue, keeps people informed of meeting times and dates, and deals with many of the day to day running tasks; moderator, the person who ensures meetings are run in an orderly and peaceable fashion (rotating); and potentially a treasurer, if regular monetary transactions need to be made .
- Any group bank accounts must have three members as signatories, two of which are required to make any cheque or withdrawal valid.
- We will meet once a month with the possible exception of December and/or January for summer holidays.
- Each meeting will have someone designated as a moderator. The moderating position is a rotating one, everyone is required to moderate at least once a year.
- The moderator's job includes:
 - ensuring that we get to the business of critiquing and discussing writing/performing as a group within the first thirty minutes of the meeting.
 - ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak and that no one takes over the discussion. This includes keeping track of how much time each person is taking for a critique and letting them know when it is time to wrap up.
 - ensuring that discussion remains peaceable and constructive.
 - making sure there is time during the meeting to make announcements and to discuss any issues of concern.
 - moderators are to fulfill the demands of their position in a polite and sensitive manner, while remaining assertive that we all abide by the rules and guidelines. Yelling at another member

to "shut up" is not acceptable. Firmly and repeatedly reminding someone that they are in breach of our rules or guidelines when they are is acceptable and your job.

- A moderator cannot be the person who is being critiqued during a meeting.
- The organiser's job each meeting includes:
 - determining consensually when and where the next meeting will take place.
 - reminding people who is on the roster for critiquing and who for moderating next month.
 - taking down any additions to the roster.
 - making announcements and sharing news.
 - moderating discussions of any issues of group concern or interest, if need be using an agenda and standard rules of order.
 - dealing judiciously with complaints.
- Each meeting will involve the critiquing of at least one work.
- Everyone is expected to bring writing implements (i.e. pen, pencil, paper, computer) for taking notes.

Rules of Critiquing

- You will take the time to read other's works in the same way as you would like your own work to be read.
- Keep your critiques to less than ten minutes. If you require more, then you should get the permission of the writer and the moderator for extended time.
- Critique the writing, never the writer. Never say, "You are..." or "You should..." Instead say, "The writing is...", "The story is...", "I feel...", "I believe...", "I think..."
- Find what is right in each piece before pointing out what you feel needs work. Use the formula: Praise, Instruction, Praise.
- Don't say, "This is how I would write it;" how you would write it isn't the point.
- Remember that subject matter is personal. You don't have to like a routine to give it a fair critique.
- Remember what your biases are and critique around them.
- Remember that real people wrote this stuff, and real people have real feelings. This means telling the truth in a constructive and specific manner, not an overly general and destructive one.
- Things you may not say while critiquing:
 - "That's awful."
 - "That's stupid."
 - "You couldn't write your way out of a paper bag."
- Other members of the group may not critique someone's critique of a member's writing. Only the moderator may remind people when they are speaking outside of the guidelines. If those critiquing simply differ in opinions, they may state their difference during their individual time and must direct this statement to the author. Arguing amongst ourselves is not useful.
- You can NOT speak about other people's work outside of our meetings.

Rules of Being Critiqued

- You will stick to the roster and be prepared to be critiqued on the date you agreed.
- Copies of your writing must be e-mailed at the latest two weeks before your critiquing session to give everyone sufficient time to carefully consider your work. You will submit for critiquing around 2500 words. Please discuss with the organiser if you wish to bring much more or less than this number.
- Always be sure that your name is directly on your work and at the top of each page with a page number. This ensures that your efforts are copyright protected, helps if pages accidentally get jumbled, and makes it easier for the group to follow along on page specific comments.
- In the interests of not spreading viruses please select one of these options: send your work within the text of your email, or send your work as a ".pdf" (preferable), ".rtf", or ".txt" attachment.
- Listen. The person who is speaking has taken the time to read your work, and wants to help you find ways to make it better. You may ask some questions for clarification, otherwise keep your mouth shut except to say "thank you".
- Wait until everyone has finished critiquing before making comments. The moderator may enforce this.
- Explain only if necessary. Don't rebut.

- Take notes.
- Realize that everything can be improved.
- Be willing to make changes. Conversely, don't change anything you feel must remain in order to make the story yours.
- Things you may not say when being critiqued.
 - "You're wrong."
 - "You're an idiot."
 - "Your mother was a hamster and your father smelled of elderberries."

(Critiquing rules derived from Holly Lisle's Schrodinger's Pet Shop Members' Handbook <http://www.hollylisle.com/fm/Articles/group1-a.html>, 1992.)

Membership Rules

We have limited spaces. To join you must submit a sample of your writing to the organiser. If the organiser feels you would fit in well with the group, you will be asked to meet for an interview. If you pass the interview, you will have a probationary membership for three months. During that time one piece of your writing must be submitted for critique. If members are comfortable with you and your material, and there are no complaints, you will be granted a full membership. At this time your membership fee becomes due.

Our purpose is to form an effective body of dedicated and supportive writers. We are a private group. Attending meetings is a privilege and not a right.

Memberships can be revoked—for failure to follow critiquing rules, for failure to follow protocol in being critiqued, for failure to turn up at meetings, for failure to follow these guidelines and rules, or by a general vote of the other members. We want your experience of this group to be enjoyable and constructive. Please make efforts to put in the work, be sensitive and tolerant of others, and generally cooperate.

Should any writer miss three meetings running without apology, they will be removed from our mailing list and lose access to the Web site. Should a writer miss four meetings, even with apology, they also forfeit membership.

Should any writer not contribute to critiquing the work of other members more than three times, they will lose membership. If others put in the work to critique your writing, you are expected to pay back their efforts in kind. Writers are also expected to participate in group exercises.

A writer who loses membership with the group will have their membership fee refunded, pro rata, and consequently will not be able to access any group meetings or the website.

Note: Be careful about discussing ideas with this group or anybody. Ideas are not copyrightable. Discuss ideas after they have been put to paper (or electrons, as the case may be).