

One of the most important parts of writing is the feedback one gets. Did the reader enjoy the story? If not, why? Did they love the story, if so why? What was their favorite part? The questions can be quite endless, and just about all feedback is good because it helps one grow as a writer.

Ahh, you caught that, right? I said, "*Just about*" because sometimes some feedback isn't even worth the time and effort to read. Now, I'm not going to lie, any negative feedback can, at times, be hard to hear. As a writer, I know how easy it is to get all wrapped up in what I'm writing. To see the entire story laid before me rolling out like a movie.

My job is to put those visions, characters, and scenes onto paper. And honestly, sometimes I forget key elements because it's just so much a part of what I know about the location, character, or scene that I fail to transfer that information to the reader. At other times, I intentionally hold back because I believe readers like to piece things together for themselves instead of being spoon-fed.

Years ago I heard about a reputable writing website where you could join for free and post chapters, articles, blog posts, or whatever you wrote and get feedback on it. The feedback you obtained is supposed to be specific to your needs. Are you looking for a grammar check or do you want someone to check for plot holes? Maybe you're just looking for readability. Whatever your needs are, you simply let people know so that as they read and critique they can tell you. The catch is that you must also critique another writer's work in order to earn enough points to be able to post your own.

One year, I was so excited by a Nano project I'd worked on that I wanted to post a very VERY raw first chapter. And after earning enough points, I quickly did just that. I explained that the chapter was raw, but I was looking for feedback on viewpoint. I'd written it without a clear point of view, because: Nano. But in revision mode, I had decided who was telling the story, and I wanted to be sure that it came across as such.

Unfortunately, the feedback was all over the map, and it was complicated by the fact that I had no idea I could go in and edit my piece as the information came in. So fifty people wanted to point out that one comma I missed. Six people caught the fact that when I used

“search and replace” for a character’s name, I’d missed one. Thus halfway through their reading someone named Bill appeared and all six people said, “Who the hell is Bill?” I admit, I actually laughed so hard I had tears streaming down my face. If only they knew the drama I’d gone through to pick character names!

*Quick Tip: Don’t rely on search and replace!*

*Your Friendly Author*

Most of the feedback was helpful in my endeavors, but I will never forget that *one guy* who’s feedback was not only unhelpful, it was pretty rude. I’m not sure where he thought my story was going, but he was sure I should drop him an email so he could make it go that direction. His feedback didn’t once answer the question I asked. Instead it rewrote whole paragraphs for a story far different from what I was after. I never did email him, but I still have that critique tucked away, and every now and again I look it over and smile, because I appreciate that he took the time out of his day to read what I wrote.

Earlier this year I decided to revive my dormant account on the aforementioned website. Remember, one of [my writing goals](#) for this year was to submit the first three chapters for professional critiquing before I enter it into a contest. I’ve read and edited those chapters so many times I know I’m not likely to catch any further errors no matter how obvious they are.

Thus, in a fleeting moment where common sense was tossed aside, I awakened my account. It took me ten minutes to find the website, the name of it having long since escaped me. Then I had to slog through other people’s work in order to even leave my chapters.

Now, I’m not going to lie. Telling you I had to “slog through” other people’s work sounds rather mean spirited. Here’s the thing, I don’t like critiquing other people’s work. I don’t. It’s hard for me to remove myself from the writer’s chair and read a piece that is still in its absolutely raw stages of life with the eyes of a reader. And, there are many people who’s writing gets skipped over because the pieces are so incredibly raw.

*I don't like critiquing other author's work.*

When I opt to earn points for a review, I pull up someone's piece that has been skipped over for more favorable writing. And I try desperately to leave good feedback along with any negative comments that I may have. For the most part this works quite well. I worked through two very long pieces that have incredible potential. I had both people reach out to me asking for advice, suggestions and help. I felt incredibly overwhelmed. That's not the hat I wear, and the vision I might have for their story might not be their own.

Did I also mention it's super time consuming to critique other people's work? Does that sound incredibly selfish? I hope not, but maybe I can explain. I read through what the person has written, and I leave inline feedback for just about everything they've typed up. Things like: "Oh, I love the vision this puts in my mind.." Or "Your character has potential, but he's showing 0 emotion, and feels flat." Sometimes I'll even give a couple of half-sample sentences for people to work with.

Working through two reviews can take me most of the day. And my stress levels get a little too high at times, which means I have to take a break and walk it off. My family finds my reactions slightly amusing as I sit there nodding my head one minute and then banging the table as I verbalize my comments before I take deep breaths and throw in a few smiley faces along with the bad news.

So I get it, I get that if anyone is willing to take the time to slog through what I wrote I'm grateful. Except for when the feedback is so all over the map it leaves my head spinning. Let me give you a little spoiler about the book I'm currently working on.

The story opens up with a police officer racing through the ER looking for someone. He's not incredibly articulate about who he's looking for, but it's evident from his actions that he's in distress. By the end of the chapter we learn that it's his baby sister who was found in a mangled car, parents deceased. The child is now hanging on to life by a mere thread.

The chapter ends with the police officer and his work partner sitting on a bench outside of the

hospital. They are intentionally avoiding the waiting room as they are still in uniform and don't want to be asked questions about the wreck while they process their own grief and wait for news about the patient. Chapter two begins with a flashback to the accident.

While I know flashbacks can be frowned upon in writing, I believe this one is important. I wanted to get feedback on if the flashback worked, and for grammar issues people might spot. I posted the first chapter, then the second chapter, and waited for the feedback to roll in.

And when it did, it reminded me as to why I'd stopped using that particular website. I know I said earlier that feedback is important, and that's because it is. I had a Beta Reader find a very tiny plot hole I'd made that was quickly fixed. That's helpful feedback. I had another Beta Reader say that while one of my descriptions was fine, it was also falling into the typical trope for that particular character's personality. I agreed and made a change.

However, the feedback I obtained from the writing website was just... Funny. I still have it all saved away, because as I said, people took time out of their day to read things over for me. Even if they think that the pile up on the highway should have only involved two cars. Or if they think that it was unprofessional of a police officer to be upset that his family member was hurt. Or, the funniest one: jumping to the conclusion that all the brothers were police officers and so the one who's actually a farmer was "completely out of line for his behavior." I guess being upset at the death of his parents crossed a professional line in the reader's mind..

*You simply cannot please everyone all the time.*

My absolute favorite feedback from the whole experience was where one person said, "I love this opening, I'm engaged, and immediately engrossed in the story. I couldn't get enough. My only complaint is that you didn't post another chapter yet!" Followed seconds later by someone else commenting that, "This opening is stupid. I would have written it differently."

Not only is the second comment not constructive and therefore unhelpful, it's just a matter of opinion. Three people wanted me to spell out sooner that the main character was a police officer, because apparently wearing a police uniform and driving a police car were not evident enough for them to understand he was a LEO. In fact, one of them thought he was an escaped convict running away with the car. That comment caused me to spew water out my nose. (Word to the wise, when reading critiques and reviews, make sure you're not eating or drinking.)

When a fellow author was offering me help on writing my first ever synopsis. She offered some ideas for change, as did a few other trusted Beta Readers. In the end she pointed out that, "You have to decide what you like best, make that change, and send it off. If you keep trying to please us all, you're never going to meet your deadline."

And that little lesson has stuck with me.



Dear Reader,

I know you've probably noticed the fact that I've avoided naming the website, and I hope you'll forgive me for continuing to do so. It's listed as one of the best for feedback, and perhaps it is for some people, but not for me. I don't have a paid account for the website, and that may be part of the issue.

You won't get better feedback just because you have a paid account, but you can find a group of fellow writers, or readers, who understand where your project is going and can follow instructions to look for plot holes, grammar mistakes, and POV issues. From there you can share your work directly with just those people.

That's not all that different from the experience I have with my local writing group, and we don't charge a fee to join. My group is willing to deal with my insufferably long winded

sentences and crazy typos. My constant, “Help, I need a replacement word!” or “Quick, names, I need names!”

They can also be serious long enough to give honest feedback that’s helpful, and can be worked with. I don’t have to pay to ask specific questions about any of the suggestions given. And we aren’t trying to outshine each other, but help each other shine as brightly as possible. In the meantime, I’ll keep the feedback, good and bad, tucked in its safe spot, because at least someone was kind enough to take the time out of their day to read it.

The Reluctant Author 