

## **SOME DO'S AND DON'T'S FOR CRITIQUERS**

by Kate Wilson

### **DO...**

...find a group that suits your lifestyle, experience and information-processing style. If you're a good listener and can process and analyze quickly, a face-to-face group where participants read their work aloud might appeal. If you need to read rather than listen in order to critique, make sure your group distributes submissions in written form. Some face-to-face groups do that at their meetings; others send out the work ahead of time, which is helpful for those of us who need to reflect and digest before critiquing. Of course, online and email groups by their nature allow this kind of "think-time."

...provide thoughtful, on-time critiques. Your relationship with your fellow "critters" is a commitment. If you find you frequently can't make it to meetings or that you aren't emailing your critiques on time, or if you often don't have work of your own ready to submit, then you may need to rethink your membership in the group. (On the other hand, life happens, and if your group doesn't have provisions for emergencies or for temporary leaves-of-absence, you might want to add some.)

...decide before you look for a group if you'd like to find one with a focus on a single genre (e.g. picture books only) or target age (just young adult, perhaps), or if you'd be happier in a mixed group.

...be realistic about how much time you'll be able to commit. Group expectations can require as few as one or two critiques a month or as many as five or six a week. Face-to-face groups might meet every week or two or as seldom as three or four times a year. Find out before you join, or reach a consensus at the beginning if you're starting a new group.

### **DON'T...**

...pay to become a member of a critique group—with such a variety of free groups, there's no need.

...share other members' work with anyone outside the group (even your spouse or child) without permission.

...stay in a group that feels toxic to you. Are the critiques too negative? Or too positive, and therefore not very useful? Or just... off? Do you get a whiff of politics or infighting? Maybe the workload's too heavy, or perhaps the critiques are too few and far between. Back away slowly. There are many other groups, one of which will be a good fit for you. Maybe more than one!