

Critique Writing Partners (CWP)

A CWP is a writing soulmate, ally, confidante and critic.

CWP is like a marriage: you date, you court seriously, you deepen the relationship, then you settle into an almost telepathic partnership and get to know every last secret about your partner's writing and each other's characters.

Finding your Critique Writing Partner

- **Join a local writing group** - large or small - and get a feel of the different writers, their personalities, experience and goals
- **Join larger writing societies and associations** such as the Romantic Novelists' Association and the Historical Novel Society and talk to people at their parties and conferences.
- **Go on writing courses** to improve your craft. You'll meet other like-minded people serious about achieving their goals because they've laid out money for such tuition.
- **Be open** – Alison and Denise were both small business owners with no (apparent) literary pretensions, but both secretly bursting to be novel writers

You might have found a person who would be a good fit. Check the following:

- **The two of you must be on the same wavelength** for goals and have personalities which gel. The personality and character of the other is as important as her critique writing skills. As the relationship develops between the two of you, you will both find your rhythm, your style, your way of maintaining a close and comfortable relationship. The person who you think might be the right one could be a great match for another writer but in the end not suit you.
- **It's fine - often better - if the other person writes in a different genre** from you as you will have fresh eyes for your partner's work and they will for yours. If you both write, for instance, cosy crime, you might find it becomes rather competitive and you will always think your partner's work is superior to your own. And she will think the same about yours!
- **If they live a long way away, don't rule them out.** You can always Skype each week and arrange to meet occasionally in person.
- **Know what you want/expect from your CWP.** Is it help on plotting, characterisation, emotion, cliff hangers, layout, social media promotion, structure, early proof-reading for grammar, punctuation, typos etc., a sounding board, or cheer leader? You'll find you both have various strengths and weaknesses just as in a business partnership

Vital dos and don'ts

- **Schedule** in longer pieces of work such as a novella or a novel; agree together when you'll be sending it to her and approximately when you'd like it returned. Keep to agreed deadlines.
- **Never resent** the time you spend critiquing each other's work. It will highlight possible weaknesses and potential improvements in your own work.

- **Remember it's *your* work** in the end. If you don't agree with something your CWP suggests, then don't do it. But before completely disregarding it, think about it.
- **Be prepared to disagree.** It's part of the very nature of the relationship
- **Never say the other's work is good if, in your opinion, it's not,** but you're afraid to hurt her feelings. Being kind won't help her to be a success.
- **Contact the other regularly** even when you have nothing for her to critique, especially if you feel depressed with yet another rejection. She can remind you of past successes, even if it's a short story that was long-listed, give you a kick up the bum if you haven't been producing any writing lately, and say just one thing to get your creative juices going again.
- **Resolve any disputes fast.** Be honest, but accept that you might be wrong.
- **Celebrate together** and have fun!

Trust is the most important element of all. You have to trust that they're good at writing, that they are serious about their writing, and most of all that they 'get' your work and critique it with what Alison and I call 'Brutal Love'. This does not mean criticise. Most of all they genuinely want the best for you. They want you to grow, to improve, to have successes. They are happy for you when you reach various milestones, and sympathise when you've had rejections, when you think you'll never make it as a proper writer they will gee you up, cheer you on, and make you feel ready to face it all again.

Being recognised from your writing by the public is one of the most difficult things to achieve, but when it happens it's so exciting. And your CWP will enjoy being part of your success - as you will hers! And if she becomes a friend (they often do) as well as a CWP, then you will have an added bonus.

Happy writing!

Alison Morton

Alison Morton writes Roman-themed alternative history thrillers featuring strong heroines with entangled love lives. Ever since handing over her first draft to Denise Barnes in 2009 for critiquing, she's considered herself blessed. In 2018, two award-winning trilogies and a novella later, she knows she is. Latest book CARINA, published November 2017. Alison is the RNA's first Independent Member
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Denise Barnes

Denise Barnes has written and had published two memoirs, but was desperate to write a novel. So in 2005 she sold her business and began what was to become the award-winning historical trilogy: *The Voyagers*. She is now writing a historical series for HarperCollins, and the first one, *An Orphan in the Snow*, published Nov 2017, shot into *The Bookseller's* top twenty chart in December. It's nearly a decade ago when Denise tentatively put her first horribly-rough manuscript into Alison's hands, but happily admits she wouldn't be where she is today without the best CWP ever.
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