

Writing groups are considered by many emerging and established writers as an extraordinarily important way to maintain one's writing practice.

As a writer, a writing group can expose you to the work and creative processes of others, give you deadlines to keep you moving along with your work, act as a space for creative exploration, and provide a forum to gain feedback on your writing.

But how do you establish a Writing Group? Where do you find other writers to work with? And how can a writing group support your own writing?

Where to begin

Firstly, it is important to consider what the initial purpose of your writing group is. Writing groups exist for a range of different reasons, and it is important to think about what you want to get out of it.

- What do I want to get out of a writing group?
- What are my own writing goals?
- How will a writing group assist me?
- Will the group share and critique each other's work?
- Will the group provide a quiet space for writing and/or writing exercises?

These questions will help you establish an initial scope for your writing group and determine what it is your writing group may do. As the group begins to form this scope may change, but it is important to begin by knowing at least broadly what it is you would like to get out of your group.

Finding writers

As a writer, you may already know people who are either also writers or are trying to set up a writing practice. Invite them to join and have a say in the scope of the group!

Alternatively, if you don't know people interested in writing, place an advertisement somewhere. Your local library will likely have a noticeboard you can advertise such opportunities on, as will your local community centre. Or you can include a free classified in the Writers Victoria enews:

www.writersvictoria.org.au/member-listings

We also have a page on our website that lists writing groups open to new members:

www.writersvictoria.org.au/resources/writing-groups

Where will you meet?

If you're meeting with friends, it may be easier to use someone's home, perhaps rotating between locations. However, if your group is open to the public, meeting in a centralised public place is a better idea – a room in your local library, a quiet local café, or a room at your local community centre are all fairly easy to find and meet in.

Writers Victoria also has meeting-space options available for our individual members and for writing groups who have taken out a writing group membership: www.writersvictoria.org.au/place-write

If you are using a public space, see if those who run it can help support the writing group, perhaps by advertising for you. They might even help you host small events, such as a public reading of work generated by the writing group.

How often will you meet?

This is a hard question to answer as it depends on those involved. Meeting too frequently can burn people out, especially if there are writers who are creating new work between meetings to share with the group. Not meeting frequently enough can result in writers losing momentum on their creative projects.

It might be best to determine how often to meet based on the availability of those in the group, especially if your group is one among friends. If it is a more public group, then it is best to set a regular time and allow for those who are prioritising the group to come when they can.

As a general rule, meeting either fortnightly or monthly appears to be the most fruitful practice for most writing groups, and appears to be the frequency with which most of the writing groups listed with Writers Victoria meet. Most writing groups seem to meet for 1 to 3 hours, but this is up to your members.

How should the group run?

To answer this question, it is important to refer back to your initial questions, as knowing the purpose of your group will aid in the running of it. It is important to make sure that the focus of the group is writing.

- Why are we all here?
 - Is it an interest in a specific genre?
 - Is it to establish a space for fruitful writing practice?
 - Is it a space for discussion and feedback?

It's also important to be clear about how democratic the group is going to be. As the person initiating the group, will you be the facilitator of activities and establish a schedule or agenda for each meeting of the group? Or will you open the running of the group to discussion? Will there be a different facilitator each meeting? Will one participant be chosen to bring and facilitate a new exercise each meeting? Will the group need leadership, or is its priority focused work in a shared space?

If the group is planning to critique each other's work, what are the ground rules? Feedback needs to be honest and constructive in order to be useful, but you also need to create a safe space. Do you want work to be submitted in advance to allow readers to prepare? Do you want feedback to be written or verbal? It's important to get this right from the start, both to protect relationships (for when critique is too harsh) and to make sure the group is useful (for when critique is too complimentary).

It's also good to think about how the group will operate in between meetings? Will you set each other homework or deadlines? Will each member need to prepare something to share at each meeting, or will you take turns? Does everyone need to provide feedback on everyone else's work?

Keeping these questions in mind ought to guide how the group will operate both in and outside meetings.

How should the group communicate?

There are a number of ways to aid the communication of group members. Firstly, a list of members with their emails and phone numbers is a great help, and provides the opportunity for those who may not know each other well to get in touch with other members and meet up outside of the group. Having an online shared space such as a Facebook page or blog will also help the group communicate and keep up to date with exercises and discussions if they miss a meeting or two.

It is also useful to establish a Google Drive or Dropbox, as this provides a location where people's work can be shared and viewed by others, which can help when reading each other's work when providing feedback.

It is best not to upload your work directly to Facebook as the user agreement asserts that Facebook owns anything uploaded to their website – including your writing!

Where can I find other writing groups?

If you're in Victoria, check out our website for a list of writing groups open to new members:

www.writersvictoria.org.au/resources/writing-groups

If you live in a different state, it is best to begin by looking at the directory on your state's writers centre:

- NSW Writers Centre: <http://www.nswwc.org.au/>
- NT Writers' Centre: <http://ntwriters.com.au/>
- Queensland Writers Centre: <http://www.qwc.asn.au/>
- SA Writers Centre: <https://sawriters.org.au/>
- Tasmanian Writers Centre: <http://www.tasmanianwriters.org/>
- Writing WA: <http://www.writingwa.org/>

Credits

This resource was developed by Josiah Ludlum as part of a Writers Victoria internship.