

Confluence Poets Workshop Guidelines and Rules of Engagement

- 1) ORGANIZE POEMS in ALPHA ORDER: If you are meeting in person, bring the appropriate number of copies of your poem to the meeting and distribute your poem to all present. If you are meeting online, email your poem when you RSVP that you will attend the virtual meeting. Organize your copies of the poems in alphabetical order by title. This is the order in which the poems will be workshopped.
- 2) READ THE POEM WITHOUT COMMENT: When it is your turn to have your poem workshopped, let the poem stand on its own. Refrain from any preamble: from saying anything about why you wrote the poem or your intention for or concerns about the poem. Just read the poem.
- 3) LISTEN, THEN ASK: When your poem is being workshopped, take time to listen to the feedback from the other poets. Refrain from defending your choices. After you have listened to everyone's input, feel free to ask clarifying questions. You are also welcome to ask questions that honor the impulse of the poem.
- 4) OFFER FEEDBACK on HOW the POEM WORKS: When you offer feedback, focus on the poem itself as a work of art. Refrain from commenting on the content of the poem. As Coleridge advised, engage in a "willing suspension of disbelief." Respect the author's point of view and focus on how the author can achieve their intent for the poem. Rather than assuming that the "I" in the poem is the author; refer to the "I" as the "speaker" of the poem. In addition, refrain from personal remarks directed at the author or anyone else in the room.
- 5) OFFER CRAFT FEEDBACK: When you offer feedback on craft, consider the effectiveness of diction, imagery, music, form, voice, as well as line and stanza breaks. If there is a central metaphor, is it working—and is it well developed? Is the poem more impactful if the poem were written in a different point of view (1st person vs. 2nd vs. 3rd)? Does the structure, including the sequence of lines and stanzas, serve the poem—how does the poem unfold? Are there any places where you are taken out of the poem—why? Is the poem working on all cylinders: imagery/metaphor, music, shape/form, diction, voice, structure, dramatic arc?
- 6) OFFER BIG-PICTURE FEEDBACK: In addition to offering feedback on the craft of the poem, look at the poem as a whole. What is the poem doing? How can the poem deepen? Does the poem discover something that surprises you? On what journey does the poem take the reader? Where is the emotional heart of the poem? Where is the tension? Does the poem move you—what does the poem make you feel?
- 7) MOVE ON WITH CONSENSUS: Before moving on to the next poet, ask the poet whose poem is being workshopped if their questions have been answered. In addition, ensure that everyone providing feedback has had the opportunity to finish writing their thoughts. Return the poem with your written feedback to the author.