

Welcome Pack



The Writers

Who we are

The **Berlin Nonfiction Circle** is a twice-a-month meet up of authors, journalists, hobbyists and other writers currently working on nonfiction pieces (and sometimes fiction too).

Who you are

You do not have to be a published / accomplished writer to join. But, you should take your writing seriously, and you *must* provide feedback to the other writers, if you want them to give you feedback in return.

How to join:

[Email me](#) or message me on WhatsApp (+49 1789 615121) with a writing sample and any other information you think we need to know about you. This could include:

- What you're working on
- How much you write
- Your credentials
- How many meetings you think you'll be able to join.

The Workshops

Workshop Location

The workshop meets twice a month at [Hasenheide 74, 10967 Berlin](#).

Workshop Schedule

- Meetings take place every two weeks on Tuesdays
- Meetings start at 6:30 p.m.
- Meetings last up to 2 ½ hours

Workshop format

- Writers submit their work to the group.
- We read them at home, drafting feedback
- During the meetings, we discuss our feedback on the work
- We provide feedback on up to 4 pieces in each meeting

Workshop rules

Workshops can be a bit loose, but there are general rules we try to stick to:

- We start by workshopping a piece.
- First, we go around in a circle and point out what we noticed.
- Then we ask broader questions.
- And then we offer generous, constructive criticism.
- We end each piece with time for the author to ask questions.
- Then we move onto the next piece
- Pieces are workshopped in order that they were submitted
- Authors cannot respond while their pieces are discussed *unless specifically asked a question*.
- We do not give 'line edits' (punctuation, grammar, formatting, spelling etc). You are welcome (but not expected) to give line edits separately.

Submitting work

To make the best use of everyone's time, we are strict about submissions. This ensures that the work you submit gets the best possible feedback from your peers:

1. The **deadline to submit** is the Thursday before the next meeting. You will upload your submissions to the Telegram group, or email them in.
2. Pieces must be **double spaced, in 12pt font, and cannot be longer than 8 pages.**
3. If you submit more than 8 pages, members won't be expected to read them all.
4. Drafts **must be finished.** Even first drafts must be polished to the best of your abilities. Do not submit 2,000 words of rough scribbles.
5. Include in your submission:
 - Whether it's part of a longer piece, or if it is a complete work
 - The audience you are targeting
 - The place where it will be published (newspaper, industry website, book etc)
 - What specific feedback you are looking for (if any)

How to create a ‘finished’ draft

First drafts can be terrible (they normally are!). But, you should still try to create a piece that is error-free and sounds good, even if it’s a long way from being ready to publish. ‘First draft’ *does not equal* ‘shoddy work’. So, here’s are some tricks to finishing a draft:

- Let it sit for a couple of days, jot down ideas, then incorporate these changes.
- Print it out, double-spaced, and read it out loud. Mark on the paper any changes.
- Put it through a spelling and grammar check (do this!)
- Check for other common, distracting elements that often appear in 1st drafts:
 - Inconsistencies in tense use (past/present)
 - Lots of repeated words
 - Sentences starting with the same word (e.g. “I” or “the”)

If there are more than four pieces submitted before the workshop, we may ‘reject’ pieces that aren’t ‘polished’ enough.

How to give feedback

Members will read through submissions before the workshop. Members will also bring with them a one-page critique. These can be structured as you like, but we suggest that you split your feedback into three sections:

- 1) **A short descriptive paragraph** of your observations. This lets the author know if you understood what they were trying to do. Did you ‘get’ the piece? Put the *main* thing(s) you noticed here.
- 2) **Questions**, either expressing that you didn’t understand why specific choices were made, or asking what impact different choices might make (like, “how would the story be affected if you switched to 3rd person instead of 1st?”)
- 3) **Generous, constructive criticism**: Not “I liked/I disliked”, but the degree to which you feel the piece fulfilled its own aspirations (“I felt like the action could be moved forwards, as I wasn’t sure what I was reading until halfway through”).

These three sections are outlined in the pages below.

Section 1: a short “descriptive paragraph”

Why do we start with a paragraph of observations?

The *most* important thing for a writer to realise is what you ‘got’ from their piece: what you understood, what you noticed, what you felt. Only then can they understand why you have given your specific questions and critiques.

Topics that you can talk about here include:

- What do you see?
- What is this piece?
- What does it do?
- What is its shape?
- What is its language like?
- How does it internally operate?
- Does it have an argument?
- Where is its climax?
- What techniques does it use?

Section 2: Asking the author questions

It can be hard receiving feedback on your work, especially when you have been labouring over it for weeks or even months. To make the process easier, we ask “questions”, which sound a lot better than “statements”, which, in practice, can end up sounding like “orders”.

Listen to the difference between this feedback submitted in question format:

- “Why did character x only appear in the 2nd half?”
- “How would the pacing feel if you started the piece when the action commenced?”
- “How would the story be affected if was in the 1st person, and not the 2nd person?”

And now as statements:

- “Put character x earlier in the story.”
- “Cut out the beginning, because it’s boring.”
- “Change it to the 1st person.”

Which kind of feedback would you prefer to receive?

Section 3: Constructive Criticism

The best form of criticism is *not* one of personal taste, it is feedback that expresses how well the reader thinks the author did at achieving their goals.

Acceptable feedback:

“In its use of strong visual description, this piece effectively conveyed the narrator’s angst as she was chased by the lime green werewolves,” or, “The lime-green colour of the werewolves conflicted, to this reader, with what I understood the piece’s goal to be, which was to bring us into the angst-driven world of the narrator.”

Unacceptable feedback:

“I don’t like lime-green werewolves and they’re stupid and, by the way, werewolves are not lime-green”, or “I liked the werewolves being green because that’s cool.”

The basic elements of writing

If you're not sure what to focus on, here are a few example topics to cover:

- **Snapshots and scenes:** literally what happened, when and where? Was it confusing? Which settings were the most effective?
- **Foreshadowing and threading:** did the writer create anticipation, and were elements woven through the story effectively?
- **Frame, tableau and zoom sentences:** how well situated were you when reading the piece? What effective tools did the author use in putting you there? Did you feel lost in time or space at any moments during the piece?
- **Resonant details, glimmers, echoes and the underlying grid of meaning:** how well did the author create a sense of larger significance? What word or structural choices were particularly effective at creating a sense of the whole? What word choices were most or least impactful, and stood out because of it in your mind?
- **Clarity, conciseness, structure and flow:** how well was information imparted? Did we learn what we needed to learn, when we needed to learn it?
- **Accuracy, objectivity and tone of voice:** did they sound trustworthy? Did they sound honest, preachy or like they have an ulterior motive?
- **Engagement and interest:** did they make you care about the topic? If so, how? If not, what was the piece missing?