

Advice For New Authors  
**WRITERS GROUPS**

By Jeanne Laws

## Part I: What They Can Do For You

Writing is an inherently solitary career. Unless you have a writing partner, it's just you and your characters working your way to "the end". Sometimes that's a good thing. I mean, my characters are some of my best friends. \*wink\* Even so, finding a writers group is can be helpful to writers, of any level, for many reasons:

### **They're Crazy, Too**

As well meaning as friends and family can be, it's difficult to understand what goes on in the mind of a writer unless you are one. Do your characters talk to you? Do you dive for your notepad when inspiration hits -- even if you're doing 60 on the freeway? Other writers "get it" and won't look at you like you're crazy. They're crazy too! From commiseration over the inevitable rejection, to celebrating your milestones with you, writers groups provide support, collegiality, and understanding it would be difficult for most of us to find elsewhere.

### **Your Baby's Perfect**

Writing is an intimate experience. Though the finished product is for public consumption, the act of creation is intensely private and personal. But because of this fact, no writer can be completely objective about her work. Your blood and sweat is on every page! It's your baby! Of course it's perfect!

Your "baby" may or may not be perfect, but a writer can only benefit from having another writer critique her story. Note I said "another writer" -- having your husband/mother/best friend give you feedback is not the same. Occasionally, a writer will have a friend or family member who is a great critique partner, but it is most often the case that these people want you to be happy and to encourage you in your writing -- a good critique partner just wants to make your story better.

Most writers groups offer members an opportunity to join a critique group. Getting constructive criticism on your work could be just the thing you need to get your story ready to

submit.

### **Mentors, the Grapevine & Friends in High Places**

Ideally, you will find a group that is both friendly to new writers and supportive of published ones as well. Networking with published authors is one of the most valuable opportunities you have in a writers group. Don't be intimidated! Published authors are people too! Most will gladly share tips about what worked for them, and you may be surprised how willing they are to help you out. Also, these people have experience with publisher and agents, and are often willing to share the "inside scoop".



### **There's More to Being a Writer Than Writing OR There's No Such Thing as Too Much Information**

Most of us took a creative writing class or two in high school, but chances are you haven't taken and classes to really work on your craft recently. Also, and this is very important, there is a lot more to a career as a writer than writing. And, because for all

intents and purposes you are self-employed, you are responsible to know about *every* aspect of your business. That's a lot of ground to cover. Fortunately a writers groups can help.

Most writers groups are structured around a monthly or bi-monthly lecture. Sometimes a published author speaks about their work, but often these lectures are structured to share information about writing. Topics can range from creating compelling characters, to proper cowboy jargon, designing your own website, or online promo. Also, groups like RWA offer classes for writers at their local and annual conferences, as well as online -- often for free!

## Part II: Find the Right Group For You

Now that I've convinced you to find a writers group \*wink\*, it's time to find the *right* one. There are several different types of groups and you may need to test drive a few before you find one that works for you. Remember, not all writers groups are the same, and what works for one writer may

not for another. I have an extensive list of writers groups, but it is by no means conclusive. Ask around, visit group websites, and sit in on meetings -- hopefully it won't take long to find the right group for you.

I've started with a special section on RWA (Romance Writers of America) because of their focus on our genre.

### First, A Few Things to Consider:

1. Do you want a large or small group? Larger groups are more likely to offer more support services, including contact with published authors, but you don't want to end up feeling lost in the crowd. Think about your personality, and choose your group accordingly.

2. In person or online? If you live in a rural area, an online group may be your best bet. If you live in or around a larger



city, however, you'll be able to do either. Some groups offer both options: live meetings, and an online community. If at all possible, I would recommend a group with some live/in-person element. Talking to other writers face-to-face offers a level of inspiration and support that is hard to duplicate online.

3. Is the group friendly to writers at your level? If you're unpublished, make sure the group offers support to unpublished writers -- critique groups, workshops, etc. If you're published, make sure they have things to offer published authors -- promo opportunities, etc.

4. Is the group friendly to your genre? If you're visiting this website, chances are you write romance, or even erotic romance. If you join a group of literary fiction writers, they might not be as supportive of your writing as a group geared toward romance writers specifically. And, taken a step further, not all groups for romance writers are supportive of erotic romance writers, or those who write for e-publishers. If you join a writers group, make sure they're going to support you!

### RWA: Romance Writers of America

RWA is a national writers organization devoted to writers of romance. It prides itself on offering extensive support and

services to romance writers of every level, both published and non. The annual fee is somewhat off-putting, at \$75 per year, plus a \$25 one-time processing fee, but most would consider it well worth it.

National membership gives you access to the local chapters (located across the country), as well as online "special interest" chapters. Membership fees for these chapters range from \$10 to \$30 per year -- in addition to the \$75 national fee. Below, I've included a list of the "special interest" chapters:

- [The Beau Monde Regency Special Interest Chapter](#) (self explanatory)
- [Celtic Hearts Romance Writers](#) (Celtic Romance)
- [Chick Lit Writers of the World](#) (self explanatory)
- [Electronic and Small Press Authors Network](#) (self explanatory)
- [Elements of RWA](#) (Novels with Romantic Elements)
- [Faith, Hope, and Love, Inc.](#) (Inspirational (Christian) Romance)
- [From the Heart Romance Writers](#) (Online Chapter)
- [Futuristic, Fantasy and Paranormal](#) (self explanatory)
- [Golden Network Chapter](#) (Unpublished Golden Heart Finalists)
- [Gothic Romance Writers](#) (self explanatory)
- [Hearts Through History Romance Writers](#) (Historical Romance)
- [Mystery/Suspense Chapter \(Kiss of Death\)](#) (self explanatory)
- [Outreach International Romance Writers](#) (Online (International) Chapter)
- [Passionate Ink](#) (Erotic Romance)
- [Published Authors Special Interest Chapter/PASIC](#) (Published Authors -- must qualify)
- [RWA Heartbeat](#) (Medical Romance)
- [RWA Online](#) (Online Chapter)
- [Scriptscene](#) (Screenwriting)

RWA offers many benefits to its members:

- National and local conferences for writers, with workshops on craft, the industry, and promotion, as well as opportunities to network with published authors, agents and editors.
- Online and in-person writing workshops, free or at reduced cost to members.
- Critique groups are offered through most chapters.
- PRO Membership: "To promote the interests of RWA members who have submitted at least one completed manuscript but have not yet been published by an RWA

recognized publisher; and, to enhance communication between those members and publishing professionals.” (from the RWA website) PRO membership is free to all RWA members.

- PAN Membership\*\*: “The purpose of PAN is to establish within the RWA framework a network of communication and support to effectively promote and protect the interests of published romance authors; to open channels of communication between those romance authors and other publishing industry professionals; and to encourage professionalism on all levels and in all relationships within the publishing industry.” (from the RWA website) \*\* You must be published with an RWA Approved Publisher to qualify for PAN. PAN membership is free to all RWA members.

## Other National Writers Organizations

- [American Crime Writers League](#)
- [The Author’s Guild](#)
- [EPIC: Electronically Published Internet Connection](#)
- [Horror Writers Association](#)
- [International Women’s Writing Guild](#)
- [Mystery Writers of America](#)
- [National Writers Association](#)
- [Novelists, Inc.](#)
- [Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America](#)
- [Sisters in Crime](#)
- [Writers Guild of America](#)

## Online Writers Groups and Communities

These groups do not have in-person meetings, but instead communicate through online forums and email loops. This is a great option for writers who don’t live in a city large enough to have its own writers group. Some of these groups are for writers only, and some include readers. A combo group can be less intimidating to unpublished writers, and having access to readers can be great for a writer, especially once you become published.



- [Backspace](#)
- [Erotica Readers & Writers Association](#)
- [Edit Red](#)

- [Fantasy Writers](#)
- [The Imaginaries](#)
- [My Writers Circle](#)
- [National Association of Women Writers](#)
- [Romance Divas](#)
- [The Next Big Writer](#)
- [The Writers Center](#)
- [The Writing Bridge](#)
- [Toasted Cheese](#)
- [Writers Chatroom](#)

## Online Critique Groups

Many writers groups offer the opportunity to participate in critique groups, but the groups listed below focus on that support aspect.

- [Critique Circle](#)
- [Critique.org](#)
- [Muse It Up Club](#)

## Local Groups

In almost every urban area in the U.S., you will find gatherings of local writers. To find a group near you, your best bet is to do a Google search for your area. Below is a very small sample of what’s out there:

- [Bay Area Writers League](#)
- [Denton Writers League](#)
- [Gulf Coast Writers Association](#)
- [Idaho Writers League](#)
- [League of Utah Writers](#)
- [Ormond Writers League](#)
- [Ozarks Writers League](#)
- [Poets and Writers League of Greater Cleveland](#)
- [San Gabriel Writers League](#)
- [Skagit Valley Writers League](#)
- [Writers League of Texas](#)
- [Wyoming Writers, Inc.](#)

Good luck on your journey! If you have questions about anything in this article, or have a group you think I should add to my list, please [email me](#)! I’d love to hear from you.

*Jeanne*

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