



Focus Group Member's Guide

Welcome to FlourishWriters focus groups where you access to the power of community for problem-solving, overcoming barriers, and inspiring action. Focus groups are organized around a specific type of writing project (Bible studies, fiction, memoir, etc), or planning, publishing, work-along, marketing, and critique.

FlourishWriters creates connections in your writing life, and peer support is a big part of that. Without feedback, creative problem solving, and accountability, the solitary writer is susceptible to distraction, overwhelm, and self-doubt.

In your focus group, you spur one another on and use the group support to make progress in your writing goals.

In this guide, you will find everything you need to get the most out of your focus group, including **Group Introductions** and **Guidelines for Leaders**. You will learn:

1. What is a focus group?
2. What makes a successful group experience?
3. What threatens a focus group?
4. How does the group communicate?
5. What is the meeting format?
6. What commitment do group members make?
7. Tips for giving feedback
8. Tips for receiving feedback
9. Where should I reach out if I need help?

1. What is a focus group?

A focus group is a peer support group made up of FlourishWriters who share a similar goal. It provides access to group support, encouragement, companionship, brainstorming, project feedback, and more.

Together as a committed group, you spur one another on to overcome obstacles and approach the writing life with a learning mindset. Your focus group connects you with other writers dedicated to helping each other make progress in their writing goals. With the strength of companionship in your group, you don't have to face your writing projects alone, plus you have friends to celebrate with you!

2. What makes a successful group experience?

A successful group experience is created by committed members who support one another in their writing goals. The atmosphere is encouraging and each participant openly gives and receives feedback. Showing up is key! Participating in a nurturing community with likeminded writers positions you to work through road blocks together and celebrate the wins.

Participation: Everyone is involved. No one is an expert in everything, but as each member brings creative ideas and experiences, the group thrives. Each meeting is a free give and take between all members as everyone is encouraged to speak and no one dominates the conversation.

Encouragement: Since we all have different tolerances for critique, it's important to keep the atmosphere encouraging. Everyone shares with respect for one another. It helps to sandwich comments about what needs improvement between positive affirmation. We're all trying our best, and there's a lot to learn, so cheerleading is a critical part of the group experience. We also want to improve, so be honest and open with one another.

Transparency: You'll get the most out of your experience by being transparent about your struggles and your successes. The more you let your group behind the scenes in your writing life, the more you'll experience the benefit of your meetings. No one has it all together, and no question is too simple. Those who ask receive! Being honest about your needs and praying

for one another is an important part of our community; however, the reason we're gathered is our writing, so undue focus on personal issues should be avoided.

Confidentiality: The value of transparency is made possible by each member's commitment to confidentiality. What you share in your group stays in your group.

Accountability: Let your group know how you want to be held accountable. Depending on your experience with accountability, it may feel helpful or intimidating. We're all adults, so let your group know what works for you. If you're struggling, just lay it out there. The focus groups are a *no-shame space*.

Presence: Members aim to be present and focused during any meet-ups. Avoid cell phones, emails, or side conversations. Even if you don't have much to share in a particular meeting, your presence is meaningful. You may give the gift of listening to someone else that day. If you give each individual your full attention, you'll reap the reward of true camaraderie in your focus group.

3. What threatens a focus group?

Like anything in life, the more you invest, the greater returns you receive. If members are inattentive, noncommunicative, or disinterested, the energy will diminish in your group. If the atmosphere becomes negative and conversations take on a tone of lecturing, ridicule, or complaint, the group will struggle to solve problems and create momentum in each other's writing life. But with God as our guide and a commitment to build one another up, we will overcome any obstacles.

4. How does the group communicate?

Each group will have a leader and co-leader who help facilitate communication. Each group has a space in our private community space in Circle. You may find niche interests in your group, so the meet-ups do not need to include everyone in the group all the time.

5. What is the meeting format?

The focus group meets once a month live in the private community space. Each group will design their meeting format. Leaders and members have the freedom to adjust meetings to fit the needs and interest of the group.

6. What commitment do group members make?

- Be willing to give as much help and advice as you receive.
- Check in with your focus group in Circle at least once a week.
- Participate in the scheduled live meetings that you've agreed to attend.

7. Tips for giving feedback

- Take care that your tone is encouraging and esteeming.
- Does the person want a Coach or a Cheerleader? You show up differently depending on the context.
- Especially when someone is writing a hard story, be sensitive with the words you use to critique their writing. They may be holding to their words tightly.
- Avoid black and white language. Your opinion is one of many, and you don't want to speak more definitively than the situation warrants. The rules for good writing are subjective, so it helps to acknowledge that you're sharing your opinion.
- Focus on both strengths and weaknesses. Sandwich negatives between positives.
- Pay attention to the body language of the person receiving feedback and tone it back if any discomfort is displayed.

8. Tips for receiving feedback

- Clarify if you want a Coach or a Cheerleader. A Coach emphasizes critique, focusing on how to improve. A Cheerleader emphasizes encouragement, focusing on what you did well and how you can continue to grow.
- The person giving feedback wants you to grow; they want your best.
- If you're writing a hard story and you feel vulnerable about sharing it, make that clear.
- When someone critiques your writing, they are not critiquing your value as a person, or your value as a writer. They want to help you improve your piece.
- Weigh the input of others but do not lose the vision for your project.
- Ask for clarification if needed, but rather than defend, justify, or argue, simply thank the person for their input. You can process the input later and accept or reject it.

9. Where should I reach out if I need help?

Reach out in the private community space to your focus group leader or co-leader. You can also private message our community manager, Tiffany Jo Baker, inside Circle. If you need further assistance, reach out to us directly at info@flourishgathering.com.