

HOW TO

WORK WITH A WRITER

EDITING – PRO TIPS

from the Twice 5 Miles guide
How to Work with a Writer
by Allegra Huston

- Always lead with praise. Praise energizes the writer and sets the benchmark for improvements. If you can't identify what's good about a piece of writing, you have no business saying what's not good.
- Often weaknesses are not the mark of a bad writer. They may just be a sign of a non-final draft.
- Address problems as opportunities for improvement, not as something "wrong."
- When you spot a problem, stop there. Try not to come up with solutions. If you do see an obvious solution, present it to the writer as a possibility but don't be attached to the writer accepting it. The writer may have already tried your solution or may simply not like it. Ideally, your discussion of the problem will spark ideas, and you don't want to distract the writer from following them.
- Phrase your responses as questions to the writer. The purpose of questions is not to get answers, but to provide jumping-off points for exploration.
- Accompany line edits with remarks such as "or something like that," "OK?" or "does this seem tighter?" Point out repetitions and awkwardnesses and ask, "Are you happy with this?"
- Avoid any tone, either in speech or writing, that suggests you know better than the writer or that suggests an authoritative judgment. Keep your responses personal. Also, avoid things like red pen and check marks that recall schooldays.
- Don't get sidetracked by line edits when there are bigger issues at hand. On the other hand, if the prose is so laden with errors that it's hard to read, the writer should get this fixed as a priority.
- Make quick notes of your responses as you read. Keep them short so that you don't break the spell of what you're reading. At the end of your reading session, make sure you'll be able to read them tomorrow.
- Remember: it's not your job to fix it! Your job is to *help the writer* fix it.

