You can create a writers’ group

You can do it! You may feel you’re not an expert in all writing matters. The good news is that you don’t have to be! If you enjoy writing, believe that communicating the good news of the gospel through the written word is vital and care about helping others reach their writing potential, you have the qualities you need to begin.

1. **Find two or three interested people** to commit to the group with you. Meet with this core group to make plans that fit your circumstances. Enlist the support of your corps officer as well.

2. **Publicize.** Make use of corps newsletters—printed or electronic—Facebook and other social media to publicize your group. Contact potential members through email and phone calls. But nothing beats face-to-face conversations.

3. **Find out what members hope to gain from a writers’ group.** Make use of a survey or brainstorming session to discover members’ interests, current abilities, hopes and great ideas.

4. **Enlist others to explain aspects of writing in which you are not expert.** Possible sources include: Salvationist writers, professional writers in various fields, high school or college English, journalism or creative writing teachers. Group members may also have good contacts for guests.

5. **Keep in touch with everyone in the group.** Today this is easy with email or social networking tools. Send birthday cards to each member by snail-mail. Phone, email, text or Facebook members who miss a meeting to remind them of your interest and concern.

6. **Encourage others in the group to take on leadership roles.** Share responsibilities for a small segment of the meeting, such as leading a devotional period or writing exercise. If someone raises a technical concern, ask someone in the group to research the answer rather than providing it yourself.

7. **Promote strong relationships within the group.** Plan a dinner, attendance at a play, book-signing or other event as a group. Keep all members informed when someone is ill, going through a crisis or experiencing a joy to encourage bonds within the group.

8. **Keep learning, keep growing!**

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Passing the Baton: How to Start and Run a Writers’ Group
Sample survey

1. Check all activities that would be helpful and interesting to you. Star those that interest you most.

☐ resources for writers—books, magazines, websites, workshops, etc.

☐ critiques and editing suggestions of my writing

☐ Where and how to submit work for publication

☐ how to edit my work

☐ guest writers to share their expertise. Are there writers you know who could contribute to our group in this way?

_______________________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________________________

☐ a group writing project

☐ a group trip to a play, film, author presentation

☐ studies of specific elements of writing:
  • interviewing
  • finding my voice
  • organization
  • clarity
  • great beginnings and endings
  • the ethics of writing
  • (other)___________________________________________________________

2. What kinds of writing interest you most?

_______________________________________________________________________

3. Here’s my great idea! (Use other side, if you need more space)
Dear Friends:

Several years ago in the midst of a snowy, difficult winter, one of our neighbors posted a sign in their front yard that read, "Bribe the Groundhog!" Maybe you feel this would also be a good year for Punxsutawney Phil to predict an early spring. While waiting for that time to arrive, an evening with the Montclair Writers' Group might be just what you need to revive your spirit!

At our meeting this coming Monday, February 7th, you will have opportunity to share writing you've been working on with the group as together we seek to develop the gifts God has given us. If you've recently discovered a new word you may share that, as well as questions about any and all aspects of writing. And, of course, no meeting is complete without a writing exercise.

Finally, in the midst of this winter, may these words by Emily Dickinson cheer you:

_Hope is the thing with feathers_  
_That perches in the soul,_  
_and sings the tune without the words,_  
_and never stops at all..._

God bless you!

Dorothy

PS: Just a reminder that our meetings begin at 7:00 PM in the Coffee Booth at Montclair Citadel.
Passing the Baton: How to Start and Run a Writers’ Group
Sample meeting reminder 2

Dear Friends:

What better way to begin the first week of a new year than meeting and learning with good friends at the Montclair Writers' Group? I can't think of anything I'd rather do, and I hope you feel that way too.

At our meeting on January 4th, there will be time to share writing you've been working on as well as words you've recently discovered. And if you are looking for another challenge, how about writing a six-word memoir? Ernest Hemingway accepted that invitation--successfully--and hundreds of others have followed his lead. Sydney Smith Zvara, for instance, wrote this:

"Nearing 60, still on rough draft."

Until we meet, may these six words reflect your faith:

"God loved me then--and now!"

Dorothy
Passing the Baton: How to Start and Run a Writers’ Group
Meeting activities

Your meetings can and should vary with the needs and interests of your group, but these are some possible activities for a writers’ group meeting.

1. **Refreshments.** Invite members to take turns providing light refreshments. Beginning with that allows members time to catch up with one another’s lives. We especially favor things we can continue to munch or sip on as we write and listen.

2. **Welcome.** Welcome visitors; inform the group of members who are ill or away for other reasons. If someone is undergoing a serious problem, bring a card or note for everyone to sign, assuring that person of the group’s concern and prayer support.

3. **Devotions.** Invite members to take turns sharing something they’ve read that has inspired them or something they’ve written in a devotional vein. Ask the presenter to provide copies for everyone.

4. **Announcements.** Discuss coming events that are relevant to the group. Congratulate members who have been published. Share requests for the group to assist with various writing projects and opportunities as you receive them.

5. **A writing-related topic.** Possibilities include:
   - At the first meeting, invite each person to set his or her writing goals for the year. Review these goals midway through the year.
   - Share new words recently discovered—and their meanings, of course.
   - Ask people to list as many synonyms as possible for a common word, such as *large* or *gross.* Ask the person who has the longest list to read those synonyms, then invite others to share words not on that list.
   - Report on the answer to a technical point—grammar, punctuation, capitalization—raised in a previous meeting. If possible, ask another member to research the answer.
   - Edit work sent to you for review by the group. Give everyone a copy of the work to be edited, so that everyone can work independently, then share the results.

6. **Writing to share.** Invite people to read writing they have been working on. Encourage members to bring copies for everyone. This allows everyone to see those things that are not evident from listening alone. Encourage comments afterwards, especially about ways to make the work better.

7. **A writing exercise.** Make this something fun that provides opportunity for creative writing. Allow time for writing and for reading what has been written. It’s a joyous way to end a meeting!

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Passing the Baton: How to start and run a Writers’ Group
Sample writing goals

Chuck:
1. Write three or four children’s stories, originally made up and told to my grandchildren, about Valiant and Strong.
2. Continue writing devotions for officers on my Facebook site and make them more widely available to others.

Dorothy:
1. Begin to organize a book of meditations based on the writings of everyone in the Writers’ Group, titled The Coffee Booth Chronicles.
2. Send two or three articles to The War Cry and another publication.

Joy:
1. Write something quarterly for/about my ministry.
2. Write Part II of The Cat.

Kate:
1. Write! Anything, regularly!
2. Write 60-90 pages of a screenplay.

Kyrsten:
1. Keep paper and pen handy for writing.
2. Begin writing about the lighter side of life and our family history. (For example, about my grandfather’s possessions in our basement, “The smell in the basement”)

Linda:
1. Work on revising children’s stories and find an illustrator.
2. Write in a journal in a more consistent way.
3. Write memories of the saints in my home corps.

Teri:
1. Put together a booklet of meditations about A Soldier’s Journey.
2. Write a booklet of meditations on theme of transformation and healing, Healing Hands, Healing Hearts.

Vernon:
1. Write something.
2. Continue genealogy.
Passing the baton: How to start and run a Writers’ Group
Sample word quiz

These are some of the words we shared with each other during this year’s meetings. Match the words on the left with the definitions on the right.

1. ____________ chortle
2. ____________ fen
3. ____________ spoonerism
4. ____________ ribald
5. ____________ stentorian
6. ____________ zatzkapol
7. ____________ gimlet
8. ____________ kvetch
9. ____________ paradigm
10. ____________ mercurial
11. ____________ truculent
12. ____________ pejorative

a. accidental swapping of beginning sounds of words in speech, as in “the Lord is a shoving leopard”
b. a present you don’t need, for which you have no use
c. expressing criticism or disapproval
d. to grumble and complain all the time
e. changeable; likely to do the unexpected
f. an example or model
g. low-lying, inland marshy area
h. racy, humorous off-color remarks
i. chuckle and snort
j. to dance, skip or leap for joy
k. displaying great anger or aggression
l. extremely loud
m. tool to bore holes in wood
Passing the baton—How to start and run a Writers’ Group

Sample Writing exercises

1. Choose a kitchen or dining room table that has been part of your life. Where did you sit at that table? Who else was at the table? Write about life around the table.

2. Write about a color—green, yellow, etc.

3. Display a picture of artwork, such as *White on White* or *Black Square* by Kazimir Severinovich Malevich. Ask members to write about it.

4. Write about your first, last or middle name, using poetry or any other form.

5. Write about a teacher you’ve had.

6. Bring a bag of assorted shoes or boots to the meeting. Invite members to choose one and write as the shoe or the wearer.

7. Show a photo with no identifying caption. Ask group to write caption, headline and accompanying article.

8. Create a character sketch based on the type of car the character owns. Select the car as your starting point. Possibilities include: yellow Hummer; stretch limo; pink Cadillac; Muscle car; Volkswagen beetle; Bicycle; brown station wagon; Honda Accord hybrid; Pickup truck; Harley-Davidson motorcycle

9. Write about the most frightened you’ve ever been.

10. Ask each person to give a writing assignment to the person on his or her left.

11. Direct everyone to write a sentence to begin a story. Then pass the paper to the left, and that person will write the next sentence. Go on until the paper returns to the person who began that story.

12. Write a David-Letterman-style “Top Ten” list about things you love, things you hate, things you can count on, your best ideas, advice for new parents, etc.

13. Bill Murray’s character in *Groundhog Day* was forced to repeat the same day until he got it right. Imagine you have the opportunity to “do-over” a particular day in your life, whether you loved or hated it. Write about that day.

14. Choose a favorite fairy tale. Rewrite it as a tragedy, a limerick, a haiku, a serious academic treatise, a breaking news story, or the lyrics for a music video.

15. If we look for them, God leaves reminders that He’s present in our lives and the world. No burning bush, perhaps, no walls falling down flatter than pancakes, but small bits of evidence. Write about reminder of God’s presence you’ve experienced recently.
Passing the baton: How to start and run a Writers’ Group
Sample Writing exercises—continued

16. Write a journal entry about the writers’ group, from the viewpoint of someone who is your opposite—a man if you’re a woman, an atheist if you’re a Christian, an extremely shy person if you’re outgoing, someone who is convinced he or she is the next great author if you’re not so sure about your abilities.

17. Use any of the following as the first sentence of an article:
   • “Are you crazy? You know I can’t ……”
   • “Throughout her entire life she’d done what everyone else had wanted, or what she thought they’d want her to do. But no more. Now it was …”
   • “After she lost 300 pounds, …”
   • “I was born on February 29th …”
   • “Fred pulled down the hatch to the attic; down came a rain of rubber chickens.”

18. Use as many of the following words as possible in a piece of fiction or non-fiction. You may also make up your own list. 
   Zucchini; leprechaun; maladroit; quibble; Evangeline Booth; enigma; hide-and-seek; snarky; trombone.

19. Your eccentric character writes a letter of protest to the manager of his or her local grocery store. Write the letter.

20. Ask each person to write a few words on separate pieces of paper. Put the pieces of paper in a hat and pass it around. Each person takes out five or six pieces, then weaves those words into an article.

21. Write a story from the point-of-view of an ordinary object (a rug, chair, pen, soda machine.)

22. You find a lottery ticket in the street. It turns out to be the winning ticket ---$200 million dollars. What do you—or a character you invent--do with the ticket?

23. The phone rings in the middle of the night. Who is it? What does he or she want? In what way does this change everything?

25. Pretend you are invisible. Write about the experience.

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