CRITIQUE GUIDELINES

CHARACTERIZATION: Are the characters real, with depth and emotion, or are they recognizable stereotypes? Are the motives of the characters understandable and logical to the story? Are the good guy (s) likeable and the bad guy(s) really bad? The characters are very important to any story and they must be believable. If readers don't like the characters, they won't read on.

DIALOGUE: Does the dialogue seem realistic? Can the reader imagine real people talking as the characters do? On the other hand, does lingo, slang or an accent make the dialogue hard to read or understand?

SETTING: If the story is, for example, about the rich and famous, details of wealth must be included. If about poor people, the reader has to see that they are poor. Is there atmosphere in the story allowing the reader to experience what the characters experience? Can you see the location around the characters clearly?

POINT OF VIEW: Is the POV first or third person? If it is third person, is the narrator able to see into the heads of the characters? Is the POV consistent throughout the piece? Do you change scenes before changing POV characters?

DEVELOPMENT: Does the story develop logically, so that the reader can follow the specific changes which occur in the story, or does the story make sudden leaps which cause the reader to lose the direction of the narration? Is the progression of characters and events logical? Are there gaps in the plot that confuse the reader?

PACING: Pacing is a key to appeal; how well does the reader get involved in the story? Does the action progress slowly or quickly? How long does it take for the story to be set up? Is the reader drawn into the story from the beginning? Is it non-stop action or character development? Different readers prefer different paces in what they read.

MECHANICS: A beginning writer often has trouble with mechanics and needs help. Sentence structure, verb agreement, and aspects of basic style are considered here. If a reader feels that there are problems with mechanics, they will specify the problems seen, rather than simply stating that they are there.

Readers react to what they read. Sometimes the gut reaction to the story is more important than anything mentioned above--especially when the writer is more experienced.

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Guidelines compiled over the years by Audrey Shaffer.

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