

Working Title Playwrights'
MONDAY NIGHT CRITIQUE SESSIONS
Information and Guidelines for Moderators
Updated June 2019

Thank you for joining Working Title as a moderator for Monday Night Critique Sessions! As the evening's moderator, remember that *you are in charge*, and *your energy leads the room*. Be efficient, be upbeat, and don't be afraid to have fun!

Our goal is to create a professional, supportive, creative environment for our artists and guests. The **WTP Golden Rules** are the principles we believe are key in maintaining this atmosphere:

WTP GOLDEN RULES

- 1. Raise your hand to speak.**
- 2. Snap if you agree.**
- 3. Be constructive. Be courteous.**
- 4. Avoid using the words "like" and "dislike."**
- 5. Avoid suggestions on how to rewrite the play.**
- 6. Be respectful to your fellow artists.**

When you moderate a session, you are expected to embody and enforce these principles. As a moderator, you are not a full participant in the discussions; instead, you are like a referee, fully engaged and observant, but not "in the mix." In addition to the general golden rules, moderators should take care:

1. To *limit their personal feedback*, and *hold all personal feedback until the end of the section*. Remember that your position gives your voice weight in the room, and your preferences will influence the conversation.
2. To *avoid re-framing individual comments*, unless you are personally familiar with the individual speaking and know that they find this practice helpful. Re-framing individual comments sometimes leads participants to restate their positions. In most cases, it is enough to say "thank you" and move forward.
3. To consider the need to *re-frame overall feedback* at the end of a section. In cases where a single voice or idea gains dominance in the room, or several comments connect to reveal a bigger picture, use your voice to close out the section with an objective, nonjudgmental, positive summary. Some examples: "It sounds like people are interested in knowing more about these characters"; "I'm hearing that people are curious about the world of the play, but need to understand the rules a little sooner."

SESSION SCHEDULE

1. Arrival, Prep and Setup

- Arrive by **6:45pm**.
- A PSM will be there to meet you and set up the room.
- Playwrights will hand you scripts as they arrive. Double-check that the scripts are properly prepared: check forms, count copies, check for highlighting on stage directions.
- As playwrights and actors arrive, cast what you can and distribute scripts for the first piece.

2. Starting The Session

- Start no later than **7:05pm**. If you are still waiting on actors or playwrights, adjust the order of scripts until you find something you can start with, using the people you have.
- To start the session, welcome everyone and introduce yourself. Lay out how the night will go: “We have a full night of 4 pieces. We’ll read our first piece, take a moment to reflect and gather thoughts, then have a brief feedback session. After the second piece, we’ll take a ten-minute break, then return for introductions and plugs before we go into the last two pieces.”
- Immediately before the first selection or the first round of feedback, refresh the audience on the Golden Rules and elaborate a little on each (examples below):

- 1. Raise your hand to speak.** (“...and I will call on you.”)
- 2. Snap if you agree.** (“This gives us a sense of how many people agree, without having to repeat the same comment.”)
- 3. Be constructive. Be courteous.** (“Make sure that you’re giving your feedback in a way that it can be heard. Be considerate in your tone and language.”)
- 4. Avoid using the words “like” and “dislike.”** (“We’re more interested in exploring your actual experience of the play in more detail: what draws you in, what takes you out, what resonates. This creates feedback the playwright can really work with.”)
- 5. Avoid suggestions on how to rewrite the play.** (“Please do not suggest alterations to the narrative or characters. We are not revising; we are responding.”)
- 6. Be respectful to your fellow artists.** (“We all know the courage it takes to be vulnerable and present our work. Be respectful of the submitting artists and those sharing space with you.”)

Note to our playwrights: While all of this is in place to protect and support you, we want to remind you that not all feedback is going to be useful to you. It is up to you to filter and process what you hear tonight, use what works, and take nothing personally.

3. Selections and Moment of Silence

- Cast each piece just before reading it. Honor gender and race as the playwright has requested on their forms. Age can be flexible; if there is a substantial difference between the actor and character’s ages, let the audience know before you start.
- In the event that you do not have actors appropriate to the gender and race the playwright has specified, you may approach someone in the audience to read a role. If it

comes up for you, do not “call for a volunteer,” but approach someone privately, especially if you know they like to act.

— Remind actors that when the stage directions reader says their character name, they should raise their hands so the audience knows who will be reading which role.

— Read the selection.

— Take your “moment of silence.” Invite the audience to reflect on what they’ve heard and gather their thoughts, but remind them that all they need to do is be quiet and still. Your PSM will set a timer for one minute with a bell at the end (we prefer the “Insight Timer” app/Basu bell setting).

4. Feedback Section: Moderator Questions

— We have specific language and structure for our feedback section. This language is designed to protect our artists and support your authority to lead the room. Please adhere to these questions, and again, remember not to engage the words “like” and “dislike,” not to give “good” or “bad” judgments or your own personal feedback, and not to allow the audience to depart from the golden rules.

If the playwright has provided questions, please ask those first. If there is time for the following questions and they are useful, please ask them.

- 1. What stuck out to you? What resonated with you? What made you feel connected? This could be a moment, a word, a visual, or a feeling.**
- 2. What distracted you, confused you, or took you out of the moment? Where do you need more clarity or more information?**
- 3. What questions might you have of the playwright? **The playwright will *not* answer these questions.****

— Do not allow playwrights to answer audience questions. Our members almost never do this, but if it happens, remind them that we are more interested in the questions than in the answers, because we want the answers to be on the page.

— Time allotted per script is 35 minutes. Longer scripts will have shorter feedback sessions. For example, if the script takes 20 minutes to read, there will be 15 minutes for feedback. If a script takes more than 25 minutes, your PSM will let you know to cut off reading to allow time for feedback. Playwrights are aware of these policies.

— Be empowered to use your judgment and be flexible with feedback time. If there are some shorter scripts in the evening or we are ahead of schedule, it’s okay to let a section run a few minutes longer. Serve the evening and the artists who have been brave enough to submit their work.

— After the second script, call for a ten-minute break.

5. Plugs and Introductions

— After the ten-minute break, bring the room back together. There are usually lively conversations, so make sure to speak up and announce that we are back and ready to do our plugs and introductions.

— Let the audience know that we’ll go around the room to introduce ourselves and any upcoming projects we would like to plug.

— After plugs and introductions, go right into the next piece.

6. Ending the Evening

— Thank everyone for coming and invite them back next time.

— Your PSM will hand out payments and will help you break down the room.

Again, thank you for joining us as a moderator. Your role in cultivating the energy of the evening is key to providing our artists with a positive, useful development experience. If you have any questions about these guidelines or any feedback on your session, please reach out to Amber Bradshaw (managing@workingtitleplaywrights.com).

Contributions:

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the WTP community

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