

2021 WRITEPOD - “What We Learned” Recap

Notes taken by Jules from the tape of WRITEPOD 2, minutes 1:03 to 1:25. Where multiple participants had similar feedback, those are combined into one comment. At ELO2021 further (or different) thoughts will be welcome.

WHAT WORKED

Encouragement to create. Having a self-agreed deadline helped creators who needed an additional reason to finish a chunk of work. Due to potential complexity, elit works can take *lots* of time; additional incentive to push forward is a good thing.

Structure with 2 minutes of “initial reaction” per person followed by 20 minutes of creator-curated time (creator asking questions) for a total of 30 minutes per work.

- Agreement for minimum 30 minutes spent with each work before the meeting “set the bar low” meaning more participants would have the time. “Sticking to time” in the reaction meetings had the same benefit.
- Creators moderating two-thirds of the time spent on their work reduced the bullying that can be a feature of some writing groups.
- Making this a safe space to “jump into the deep end,” getting feedback that was “friendly, honest,” vs “is ‘nice’ fake?”
- Some creators used their 20 minutes to ask questions outside the original instructions and this led to ideas for further improvement (see below).

People reacting were diverse and perspectives were “fresh” (some examples)

- When one’s usual early-reactors are from the gaming world, interesting to have readers who are “not my usual suspects,” some of whom focused on the literary aspects.
- Creator’s regular blog readers didn’t click links, not realizing they (and their targets) were part of the work, so great to have reviewers who know to try clicking everything.
- Interesting for those newer to elit to mingle with long time participants and see their reactions too.
- Creators from different parts of the world have a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

Exposure to types of work that are unfamiliar or usually inaccessible to some of us.

- Due to platform issues, elit can have accessibility issues, but here people “packaged” some of their work so it was more accessible.
- This was “not just a WRITEPOD but also a READPOD.”
- “Reading others’ stuff was fascinating.

Opportunity to play and network. (These benefits of many elit gatherings were also true here.)

FOR NEXT TIME | WAYS TO IMPROVE

Add a new element with handoff of work: **statement of creator’s intentions**

- Work would still be shared as cleanly as possible, with instructions on how to access, no other “intro” / spoilers
- BUT each creator would include a paragraph explaining their goals / intentions (etc) that others could read *after* encountering the work but before the reporting back session
- Would reduce time spent on, “I don’t know what you were going for.” We’d still report first impressions followed by (potentially), “once I read your statement I realized ... “

Logistics of **multiple time zones, variable availability of internet** were challenging and could have been even more proactively grappled with.

Rewrite guideline to make it **OK to recommend “here’s what to do” or “try this!”**

- Some participants felt the “no advice” ground rule (from Peter Elbow) was not necessary and wanted to “break through the barrier”; people would be free to reject advice if it didn’t feel right to them.
- The way we got around it this time: some creators explicitly asked for advice in their 20 minutes.
- These works tended to be personal so advice given was not about personal vision / theme but more about navigation/structure and platform/tools tech ... speaking of which ...

Support (provide time/space for) all **three kinds of feedback: content, navigation/structure, platform/tools/tech**

- Exchanging tech expertise / tips was fruitful but could also derail the discussion.
- Have different types of pods, those with special focus, e.g. some specifically for tech/platform issues?
- Parallel pods? Have a side session for tech and platform tips? Or pair participants for 1-on-1 help with these issues?

The bar was low; it could be higher.

- Be more explicit that it’s OK to spend more than 30 minutes per work; many participants spent much more than 30 min this time for various reasons.
- “Set the bar higher. This was great. More could be better.” Higher expectations OK if they are stated up front and all agree. (If different *types* of pods, perhaps also different *intensities*?)

Additions to group agreements

- Our only agreement was not to share details of works pre-publication (which most of these were)
- Be clearer about actively welcoming creators from all communities / affiliations

More “hanging out” options

- Tone tended to be academic; there is also value in hanging out informally (is this another type of pod?)