

The Rhetoric of Recovery: Can Twelve Step Programs Inform the Teaching of Writing?

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*The more we insist upon the mystery of the writing process, the more we
abandon teaching for preaching.*

—Irwin Hashimoto

May we all find salvation in professions that heal.

—Shawn Colvin

Twelve step programs and the recovery movement in general have become such widespread cultural phenomena as to require little or no introduction. The rhetoric of recovery programs has saturated the mainstream culture. We're familiar with it from bumper stickers such as "One Day at a Time," from innumerable self-help books, and, perhaps most famously, from Al Franken's portrayal on Saturday Night Live of Stuart Smalley, the "recovery guy" whose "Daily Affirmations" show begins with Stuart gazing into a mirror and reciting hopefully, "I'm good enough; I'm smart enough; and, doggone it, people like me!" This cultural familiarity, even to the point of parody, points to the prevalence and influence of recovery programs across the country and even the world, and the laughter evoked by Stuart Smalley also indicates that such parodies touch a nerve—that the issues of addiction and recovery resonate with an audience far wider than members of twelve step groups. For many of us, addicts or not, there is something compelling about both the trauma of addiction and the possibility of transformation that a recovery program presents.

It's a drama that has at times attracted the attention of compositionists. In a 1990 article, Paul Heilker analyzes the rhetoric of popular meditation books and discusses how he has students use the conventions of this genre to write their own meditations, reflections, and affirmations. In a 1992 panel at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (later printed in *CCC*), Beth Daniell

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examines the use of journal writing as an integral part of the recovery process of several women in Al-Anon. And, in his recent book *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous*, George Jensen examines, among other things, the way members of AA meetings interact and how storytelling enables them to reconstruct their identities. What these scholars share is a recognition that the rhetoric of recovery offers a way to connect individuals to a kind of power that is not accessible through other kinds of discourse—particularly, as Heilker and Daniell argue, through academic discourse. Daniell describes this power as not only “cognitive, intellectual, social, political, and economic,” but also “spiritual” (Daniell 240).

This last adjective unsettles academics whose ideas about teaching are rooted in a tradition of skepticism and is particularly problematic for those theorists who view all knowledge as social, political, and economic and for whom references to an intangible and indefinable power smacks of Romanticism. Is it possible to reconcile the sort of spiritual power recognized by Daniell and Heilker with hostile academic skeptics? By way of answering this question, I want to recount some of my own experiences as a recovering addict and my own struggle to reconcile my atheism with the spiritual requirements of a twelve step program. These experiences have led me to reexamine some of my teaching practices and my beliefs about the writing process and about the power of groups—both writing groups and recovery groups. While in many ways, the recovery process has confirmed my commitment to the primacy of personal experience in the writing classroom, it has also caused me to consider how a greater emphasis on ritual in writing groups may help students tap into a group identity which allows them access to the kind of intangible “higher power” that is integral to twelve step groups.

My own interest in the rhetoric of recovery is both personal and professional; in fact, it is in the intersection between these two parts of my life that I have made the discoveries that I intend to discuss in this article. I have been attending twelve step meetings off and on since I was a graduate student, but my involvement intensified several years ago as a result of a period of personal crisis which sent me back to meetings and led me, for the first time, to begin to “work the steps.” The twelve steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.¹ (*Alcoholics Anonymous* 59-60)

The first step—admitting that I was powerless and that my life had become unmanageable—was relatively easy, but I faltered at the second step, “came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.” I was and am an atheist, and I grew up without any religious instruction, tradition, or ritual. I had come to the point where I recognized the need for a higher power in my life, but I hadn’t the faintest idea of how to identify that power, nor, more importantly, how to begin to feel it as a presence in my life.

It was during this time when I was grappling with the “higher power” issue that a young man in my “introduction to literature” course came into my office to conference about a writing project with which he’d been struggling. I looked over his rough work and made some suggestions for revisions—mostly areas he might explore and expand on. But, although he nodded at what I had to say, I could see by his expression that he was still troubled in a way that my suggestions weren’t addressing. When I asked him about this, he confessed that, although my advice sounded reasonable, he didn’t think it would help. He said that he felt as if his writing just wasn’t good enough. I assured him that this wasn’t true—that his rough work showed promise, that he had some interesting ideas, and that he just needed to give himself enough space and time to explore them. He only looked more pained. He said that every time he tried to write the

¹ I’ve cited the original steps from the 1939 “Big Book” of Alcoholics Anonymous. In more recent publications, and depending on the organization, the exact language of the steps may vary somewhat. For instance, in *The Twelve Steps: A Way Out*, a more general recovery book, “sanity” has been changed to “wholeness,” alcohol has been changed to “effects of addiction” and non-gendered language has been used to refer to God. It’s also important to recognize that the twelve step definition of “addiction” includes people who have unhealthy and enmeshed relationships with addicts. Thus, there are twelve step groups for addicts (such as Alcoholics Anonymous) and groups for partners and family members (such as Al-Anon). There are also twelve step programs that address destructive behaviors involving sex, gambling, eating, narcotics, and probably more that I haven’t heard of. For my argument in this article, these distinctions are not important. Indeed, AA meetings are not the ones that I attend, but I use AA language since it is the oldest, best known, and most established.

piece, he was frustrated by how useless his words seemed. He said that he was afraid that the more he wrote, the more he would find out how bad his writing really was.

For the remainder of the conference, I found myself talking to him about the need to let go of that fear and to trust the writing process. We talked about the unknown—the part of writing, and of life—where you give up control and face your own worst fears about who you are and what you are and are not capable of. I told him that I thought it was impossible to face this unknown without some kind of faith—some giving over of your will to some part of yourself and the universe that knows just how things are supposed to turn out. I told him that I thought this was true not only of writing but also of learning and of life in general and that finding the faith to face his unknown was probably much less important for this particular writing project than it was for other aspects of his life. In short, in talking about his writing anxieties, I found myself using the rhetoric of recovery. And I found that I really did believe in a higher power—and that, for me, this higher power was most palpably present in my conception of the writing process.

I don't know how much good our conversation did my student. He did manage to complete his writing project, but I don't know whether or not this success had anything to do with what I had said. I do know, however, that this was the point at which I began to connect my own recovery process with what I believed about writing and teaching, and from this time on I began, increasingly, to think about the connections between these two aspects of my life.

Every important piece of writing—including this one—forces me to face fears that are potentially debilitating. Each and every time, I begin with part of me convinced that I am an utter fraud and that I have nothing valuable to say, that any previous successes I have had were merely flukes or times that I've gotten away with faking it, and that *this* time the fraud that I have thus far perpetrated has finally caught up with me. The fact that some other part of my brain recognizes that this isn't true is of little consequence. It is not until I have mostly given up hope of things going well and that I might as well just put something on paper and get it over with that things start to come together and I can begin to trust the process—to find my higher power.

I don't know if this never-ending cycle of anxiety and redemption is equally true for most writers, or if it's only those of us in recovery for whom it is quite so acute, but I do know that, as painful as this process is, it is necessary to me not only as a writer but also as someone in recovery. Writing teaches me to draw upon my higher power and to bring some sense of order to a feeling of internal chaos. It also teaches me that what seems at first to be inadequate is, in the end, enough. It teaches me to have faith. And so I go through the process again and again, half of the time cursing myself for choosing a profession in which my fears and inadequacies are so mercilessly exposed and the other half realizing that, of course, this is no accident and that I have chosen this profession (or rather, my higher power has chosen it) because it has something to teach me.

Working the twelve steps has led me to reconsider the writing process in spiritual terms. Like many matters concerning religion and spirituality, recovery begins with a paradox—that power comes from powerlessness. This paradox,

which may well be the central element of recovery, is played out in the first two steps. The first step says, “We admitted we were powerless over the effects of addiction.” So recovery begins with an admission and an acceptance of powerlessness, with the recognition that something greater than willpower or repeated resolutions to change one’s life is necessary. This renunciation of ego is humbling but also freeing because it allows the addict to let go of the responsibility for changing her life through her efforts alone and to let go, as well, of the shame and hopelessness of repeated failures. The second step leads to the paradox. It says, “We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to wholeness.” The paradox is that once you let go of that power, you get it back. Once you understand yourself as being something more than ego, as being connected to much larger forces (however you may define them as your “higher power”), then you can begin to allow those forces to act through you.²

The writing process contains this same paradox. In my writing classroom, I use a textbook written by Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff, which begins by saying to students, “Writing is hard. Writing is easy” (xxvii). This is, I think, a great truth—I would even say a *spiritual* truth. Writing is hard because it is such a complex and idiosyncratic process, and this is the reason it eludes the simple categorization and formulaic advice of so many bad composition textbooks. It is hard because it is something that we can’t control. It puts those of us uncomfortable with uncertainty or uncertain of our talents to shame. It is hard because for many of us it is inextricably linked with evaluation. We may feel writing as a test of who we are and of how good we are, whether our audience consists of our teachers, colleagues, or even our own expectations. Writing is hard because it confronts us with our greatest fears: with nothingness and oblivion, with the fear that when we come face to face with the white page or the blank computer screen that there will be nothing inside us to fill that emptiness.

But writing is easy as well. And, just as in recovery, this ease is part of the paradox of power and powerlessness. Often writing is most powerful when it is easiest: when we let go of trying to be in control, when we freewrite, or when we’ve been at the process long enough that it takes us over. Writing is easy if and when we trust that there is some guiding force, some *higher power* that, in spite of our fears and botched attempts to control the process, leads us to get it right anyway, in spite of ourselves. Writing, like recovery, works when we give ourselves permission to be who we are and when we accept our flaws and thus accept the creativity and self-worth that are locked away behind them. Beth Daniell provides a nice example of this when she interviews women in Al-Anon who are keeping recovery journals. Daniell reports on one woman who is struggling with the writing process because of her expectations of what a recovery journal is supposed to look like. This woman says of her journal-writing experience, “I had to let go of it being perfect and then it became perfect” (Daniell 243).

Many writing classes also share something else with the recovery process: both occur in the context of groups of people sharing their “texts.” In recovery, people go to meetings where they tell their stories. Storytelling is important because people in recovery have lived their lives in shame and fear. Addiction and

² The twelve step slogan for this is “Let go; Let God.”

co-addiction are built on individual and family secrets, and telling these secrets, usually in the form of stories about one's self and one's past, is an important part of the recovery process. The group context is important because something powerful and spiritual occurs when people come together to share their stories. In hearing other people's experiences and in sharing their own, people at meetings come to recognize problems, patterns, and insights that have resonance for their own recovery, and often they are given a chance to see something of their own recovery process reflected in someone else's story. But, beyond this cognitive benefit, people sharing at meetings seek to connect with an intangible power—a feeling that involves belonging and connection but that somehow goes beyond these things—that is greater than any rational insight.

The dynamics of sharing at twelve step meetings may have some interesting implications for teaching writing. An important element of group sharing is the prohibition of direct feedback. In the "group participant guidelines" that are usually read at the beginning of meetings, people are asked to "refrain from 'cross talk.'" Cross talk is defined as "two or more people engag[ing] in dialogue that excludes others." In particular, participants are admonished not to give advice (*The 12 Steps: A Way Out* 224). The assumption underlying this prohibition is that meetings bring us face to face with people at different stages of their recovery and different levels of insight into their own process. If we believe that we have useful advice to give them, then either: 1. We may be wrong, or 2. We may be right, but our observation will not help them. Each individual needs to come to her own insight on her own. Each person's recovery is different—just as each person's writing process is different.

Giving feedback of any kind is a central feature of all writing classes and especially of those that utilize group work and peer conferencing. However, participating in twelve step meetings and observing the dynamics of sharing and storytelling in those meetings have led me to question the importance of giving feedback to students' writing. At twelve step meetings, the focus remains on the primacy of someone's story, not on other people's responses to it. What power exists in these groups comes from telling one's story in front of others and from hearing other people's stories, not from any person's response. Indeed, most often, responses are limited to the formulaic (and often parodied), "Thank you for sharing."

There are times, of course, both in writing and in recovery when direct feedback and even advice is appropriate. In recovery, an addict often seeks out feedback and advice from a sponsor: an individual with whom she develops an ongoing relationship and with whom she meets regularly to share "step work" and to report on her problems and progress. But I am suggesting that we reevaluate the primacy that feedback has even in writing groups and that we consider that the experience of sharing may be more powerful in the absence of any feedback at all. Perhaps, after all, the most appropriate response in a writing group really is, "Thank you for sharing." When I do give my students feedback, my involvement in twelve step meetings reminds me that my insights about a student's writing may be of limited value to that student. I need to offer them tentatively and humbly, not substituting my own answers for those of the student. In recovery parlance, to point out to someone how she may be falling

short of the ideals embodied in the twelve steps is to “take someone else’s inventory,”³ the equivalent, perhaps, of compositionists’ warnings not to “appropriate someone else’s text.”

Another aspect of twelve step meetings that may merit attention from writing teachers is the role of ritual in shaping group dynamics at these meetings. In *Storytelling in Alcoholics Anonymous*, Jensen examines the ritual element of meetings in some detail. He points, for example, to the complex interaction involved in the ritual statement that begins an alcoholic’s story, “Hello, I’m Bill. I’m an alcoholic,” and the ritual response of the group, “Hello, Bill.” Jensen explains:

By offering only his name, Bill is working out of the organization’s tradition of anonymity, which facilitates honesty as it discourages “a cult of personality,” an inflation of the individual’s sense of importance. The salutation is quickly followed by a confession, the first of many, that establishes a sense of community. As he says, “I am an alcoholic,” he says, “I am one of you.” As the audience responds, “Hello Bill,” they say, “We too are alcoholics; we will accept what you have to say without judging you.” (Jensen 79)

Bill’s words here are more than a way to convey meaning; they are a way of submerging his individual identity and taking on a group persona: that of the recovering alcoholic. His utterance is “a rhetorical act that transforms” (Jensen 79).

Obviously, the motives and the circumstances that bring together a classroom of freshman composition students are quite different from those of members at an AA meeting. Our students, however, are not altogether different in that we are asking them to adopt identities—those of writer or college student—with which they are largely unfamiliar and which may be uncomfortable for them. Ritual, then, may be an important element in helping a student to take on a new identity—that of a writer sharing in a group of other writers. Moreover, while peer writing groups may share many other elements with twelve step meetings, ritual is probably one ingredient that is largely absent.

This semester, in a basic writing class I teach, I have begun to experiment with ways of structuring writing groups through rituals of sharing, responding, and reflecting.⁴ When we get into writing groups, I begin by asking students in the group to read a document called “Guidelines For Sharing Writing” (see Appendix A). I’ve loosely modeled this document on the “Group Participant Guidelines” which are read at the beginning of each twelve step meeting (see Appendix B). As in twelve step groups, the guidelines are meant to insure that individuals are able to share in an atmosphere of safety and respect, but my pur-

³ The reference here is to the fourth step: “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

⁴ Although I happened to be teaching a basic writing course this semester and therefore experimented with this approach there, I don’t believe that more experienced and sophisticated writers would find it any less useful. In fact, my experiences so far with graduate students suggests to me that they are as hungry as anyone for the kind of writing community that I’ve tried to create with my basic writers.

pose in introducing them to my writing class is as much ritualistic as pedagogical. I have always given my students directions about how to (and how not to) respond to each other's writing. But by writing these guidelines down and having students take turns reading them out loud (one item per person, as it's done in twelve step meetings), I hoped to make these words into a ritual utterance—as much incantation as instruction.

One result of this practice has been a change in my students' behavior during the first few minutes in their writing groups. In the past, I have found that students take a while to get started. They usually fumble around for the first few minutes, waiting for someone to begin reading or asking each other questions about what they're supposed to be doing. While there may be many reasons for this initial reluctance to begin the work of the group, including shyness and procrastination, I suspect that a contributing factor is their unfamiliarity and discomfort with the roles they are being asked to assume in a writing group. I've found that when I insist that students begin group work with these guidelines, they seem to ease into their roles as readers and responders with less difficulty.

An experience I have had in a different kind of recovery group has suggested a way in which giving feedback might be structured in a ritualistic way. As part of my own recovery process, I attended "family week," a week of intensive group therapy at an in-patient program involving addicts and their family members. While there, I observed how group interaction was structured by the therapists in a fairly rigid way. When addicts or family members were asked to express their feelings, they were required to do so by identifying one or more of seven "primary" emotions (fear, loneliness, joy, anger, sadness, shame, or pain) without any further elaboration and without resorting to any other terminology. As a writing teacher, used to giving feedback in more complex ways, I was at first irritated with these limitations. But as the week went on, I began to appreciate their usefulness. Their benefit was precisely that they kept me from expressing my emotions in a carefully nuanced and individualistic way and forced me to focus on the commonality of my situation and of others in the group. As with the ritual greeting and response that begins storytelling in AA meetings, this formulaic way of expressing feelings tends to submerge individual experiences into the experience of the group. After responding to the question, "What were you feeling?" with the same formula, "I was feeling [for example] loneliness and shame," and after hearing other members of the group respond in the same way, one begins to identify with the others and to submerge one's individual problems and personality in favor of the "recovery persona."

A similar process was involved in responding to other people's stories and experiences. Often an addict was asked to pick several other people in the group to give feedback. In those instances, the group member was required to respond using the following formula: "What I heard was . . . ; What I saw was . . . ; What I felt was . . . ; What I related to was" This formula kept the respondent from giving advice, but, more importantly, it framed the individual member's observations within the greater context of a group process. When I responded using this formula, before I even began to offer my observations, I was reminded of the other voices in the room that had made the same utterance. In effect, my voice

became an echo of their voices, and my identity as an individual was mitigated by my identity as part of the group.

In the recovery group, what is important about both sharing and giving feedback is that words, when they are framed by ritual, do more than convey meaning; they establish a particular kind of identity and help individuals frame their experiences in terms of group norms and values. This may be a particularly important idea for college writers who likely enter composition classrooms with a sense of writing as an activity that is done in isolation and that is more a matter of expressing the “self” than of taking on group norms—or what we might call “discourse conventions.” In his explanation about how storytelling in AA transforms identity, Jensen is at pains to point out the social nature of this transformation. He writes: “The search for identity within AA might seem to be the kind of interior psychological journey that is historically associated with the Romantics: the individual goes within and discovers his true self. But taking on a new identity within AA has much more to do with the persona, a person’s social role” (Jensen 95). Just so, it is important that students identify themselves as *writers*, not only in the Romantic sense of the word, but also in the social sense—of taking on the social persona of the writing group.

Ritualized utterance, then, is an important tool for establishing a social persona. Such rituals include repeating the same words at each meeting, hearing those words echoed by others, and having them shape the way group members presents and respond to each other. In addition to having students begin each writing group by reading aloud the “Guidelines For Sharing Writing,” I have experimented with structuring feedback along lines similar to those I observed at the group therapy sessions I had observed at family week. For much of this semester, I have insisted that my students respond to each other using the formula: “What I noticed about the writing was . . . ; What I related to about the writing was . . . ; What I wanted to know about the writing was” When the members of the group are finished giving feedback, the writer is asked to reflect on what she has heard, by saying, “What I got from this feedback was”

I thought at first that my emphasis on using this script might put off many of the students, but I’ve been surprised at the good will with which they’ve indulged me. Still, I must admit that, at times, especially in the beginning of the semester, the ritual has felt a little silly and artificial. It is important to note, however, that newcomers to recovery often feel the same awkwardness at taking on a persona that is not really theirs.⁵ Creating a ritual for students to use, even when it feels artificial, helps to ease them into the social norms and values of a writing group. In fact, the importance of ritual may be a powerful argument for a sequence of writing courses in which first semester students are mixed into groups with more advanced students. As in twelve step meetings,

⁵ On this subject, Jensen writes: “As they identify with others in the program, newcomers take on a new persona (they learn how to talk ‘program talk’ in what seems to be a rather bad play acting.) Even when they are not advised to do so, they try to play a role that they do not yet understand” (Jensen 98). It’s interesting to note the similarity here to what some compositionists have said about students needing to mimic the discourse conventions of academic writing even when they do not yet fully understand those conventions. (I think, in particular of David Bartholomae’s “Inventing the University.”)

the more experienced students would be able to model the norms and values of the group for the newcomers.

Of course, as I have said earlier, there are times when more directive feedback is appropriate, just as there are times in an addict's recovery when a sponsor may offer advice and guidance. In my basic writing class this semester, I offered students the opportunity to give each other more "critical" feedback later in the semester, and I often gave such feedback myself in conferences and in written responses to drafts. Obviously, there are situations when students require guidance, particularly with complex arguments or issue-oriented papers. Still, I've found myself wondering if the writing group is not perhaps the wrong venue for this more active intervention and directive feedback. The kind of intangible energy that I've been trying to harness through structured rituals of sharing, feedback, and reflection is a fragile thing, and I find myself protective of this energy, reluctant to let it be dissipated through activities which might detract from the primacy of the writer's sharing. Twelve step groups are safe places for sharing because their rituals reinforce the message that the person sharing will be accepted as one of the group, and that she will not be judged or evaluated. More directive feedback, however helpful it might be in a *different* context, might very well destroy that sense of safety and acceptance, upsetting the focus of the group. Perhaps the ritual space of the writing group is best preserved when more directive feedback is saved for one-on-one conferences with me or assigned written responses from students to each other.

If what I am suggesting in this essay seems distinctly un-academic, then perhaps this says something significant about academics' bias towards processes that we can control and direct. I think it also reflects a larger institutional uneasiness with the spiritual dimensions of teaching and learning (an uneasiness that's pretty well summed up by the quotation from Irwin Hashimoto which precedes this essay). As students and teachers, we are taught the academic value of "critical thinking." Indeed, the rhetoric of the academy would seem to be at odds with the rhetoric of recovery—"critical" here, denoting "skepticism" as opposed to the faith required by twelve step programs. Some compositionists use terms such as "critical teaching" or "critical consciousness" to refer to processes of denaturalizing or demystifying the socially constructed power relations underlying academic conventions. My own involvement in the recovery movement has led me to believe that there are times when students may access power in their writing not by "de-mystifying" the writing process, but by "mystifying" it, by seeking out a higher power that may not be available through either the language or the methodology of "critical consciousness." But I am also suggesting that the rhetoric and ritual of twelve step programs is powerful precisely because it is socially constructed—that groups (including peer writing groups) can use ritual not in the service of "self," but to help individuals access a rhetorical power that is explicitly communal.

We may, however, be reaching a point where we are ready to question the dichotomy between spiritual and academic rhetorics. In a recent issue of *College Composition and Communication*, Lizabeth Rand discusses the hostility between Christian intellectuals and the secular academy. Rand suggests that religious writers' antipathy towards relativism and academics' discomfort with claims of tran-

scendent truth might yet yield a productive synthesis, one in which relativist ideas of knowledge may provide insight into spiritual struggles (352-53). But perhaps the greatest potential for rethinking the apparent split between socially constructed models of thinking and knowing and more spiritual approaches is their concern with ways of attaining power. Whether that power comes from the self, from the group, or from “God as we understand God,” it is worth considering ways of thinking, responding, and structuring our classes that allow students to access power that may be unavailable to them through other approaches. In recovery, it does not matter what your “higher power” is, as long as it works for you. For us as compositionists, perhaps the rhetoric of recovery, along with other sorts of spiritual or “non-academic” rhetorics, is worth investigating as an alternative path to finding power in writing. □

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Appendix A:

Writing Workshop – Guidelines For Sharing Writing

Writers in this workshop bring writing they are working on to share with the group. Everyone in the workshop promises to follow the following guidelines:

1. Writers in this workshop may introduce their writing by saying something about it. However, they may not apologize for their writing, and they may not say anything negative about it.
2. Members of this workshop will listen attentively to the writer's work. We understand that the writer is not perfect, and we do not expect nor do we demand perfection. We understand that the person reading may stumble or make mistakes. This is not important, and the person reading does not need to apologize for it.
3. The members of the group will respond to the writing being shared with supportive comments and we will express our appreciation by thanking the writer for sharing the work.
4. For the first several weeks of the workshop, the members of the group will not offer criticism nor will we give advice to the writer. We will accept the writing as it is, appreciating where it is in its stage of development.
5. We will try to allow equal time for everyone in the group to share and respond.
6. When responding we will listen respectfully to each other, realizing that what a person says is true for them, even if we disagree or see things differently. We especially value different points of view as long as they are offered in a respectful and supportive manner.
7. As writing group members, we demonstrate our commitment to growing as writers by coming prepared with writing in progress to share with each other.

Guidelines For Giving Feedback:

Group members are asked to respond to each person's writing by saying:

- What I noticed about the writing was . . .
- What I related to about the writing was . . .
- What I wanted to know about the writing was . . .

The writer, after listening to feedback, is encouraged to say a little about what he or she heard:

- What I got from this feedback was . . .

Appendix 2: “Group Participant Guidelines”

(From *The Twelve Steps: A Way Out*)

1. Recognize that your Higher Power is in charge.
 - Gratefully acknowledge the presence of your Higher Power and pray for guidance and direction.
2. Make a point of offering love in an appropriate manner.
 - Respect the needs of others by asking permission to express concern with a hug or a touch. Many are uncomfortable with physical contact.
3. Focus individual sharing on the step being worked.
 - Focus sharing on individual experience, strength, and hope in working the steps being discussed.
 - Allow equal time for everyone in the group to share.
4. Limit talking and allow others to share.
 - Keep your comments brief, take turns talking, and don’t interrupt others.
 - Respect each person’s right to self-expression without comment.
5. Encourage comfort and support by sharing from one’s own experience.
 - Do not attempt to advise or rescue them.
 - Accept what others say without comment, realizing it is true for them.
 - Assume responsibility only for our own feelings, thoughts, and actions.
6. Refrain from “cross talk.”
 - Cross talk occurs when two or more people engage in dialogue that excludes others. It may also involve advice giving.
7. Maintain confidentiality.
 - Keep whatever is shared within the group to ensure an atmosphere of safety and openness.
8. Avoid gossip.
 - Share your own needs and refrain from talking about a person who is absent.
9. Refrain from criticizing or defending others.
 - Lovingly hold others accountable for their behavior only if they ask you to do so. Otherwise, recognize that we are all accountable to our Higher Power, and it is not our place to defend or criticize others.
10. Come to each meeting prepared and with a supportive attitude.
 - Before each meeting, read designated materials and complete any written exercises.
 - Ask your Higher Power for guidance and a willingness to share openly and honestly when you communicate with at least one other group participant.