

Surviving Negative Feedback

A handy-dandy cheat sheet for Writers!

1. Your Past Experience

Do: Take a moment to think about your past experiences. Was critique given in a thoughtless way? Using inconsiderate language or in a dismissive manner?

Would the same feedback have been useful if given in a different tone? Try to identify what it was about the delivery that left a bad taste in your mouth. Be specific.

Do: Ask yourself how you would have phrased the comments differently. How might the useful points have been given, instead? What advice would you give to a new writer today if they found themselves in the same situation?

2. Your Typical Reaction

Do: Reflect on how you typically respond to feedback. What's your knee jerk reaction? Defensiveness? Anger? Discouragement? Is your first reaction to feel like you'll never be good enough? Has an inconsiderate critique caused you to doubt yourself so much that you actually stopped writing for a period of time?

Do: Acknowledge your feelings. Your emotions are your emotions. They're valid. We all have them.

The trick is to ride them out and move on without allowing them to cloud your judgement.

3. Your Strategy

Do: If you're feeling especially vulnerable after a bad experience, consider limiting the scope for now. Prepare a list of specific questions for your critique partners to focus on for your next submission. Or request feedback on only one specific item, such as dialogue. Or ask for a focus limited to the things you're doing well, to help you identify and build on your strengths this time around instead of always the weaknesses.

Do: Think carefully about who you ask. Pay attention to how you phrase your request for feedback - if you tell them to do their worst, you just might get what you asked for.

4. Your Self-Care Plan

Do: You've sent your work out for feedback. You know it's on its way back to you. Decide ahead of time what you're going to do when it arrives, starting with when you're going to read it. You're in charge of when you open the email.

Do: You know what your typical response is, so decide ahead of time what you're going to do while you deal with the resulting emotions. Go for a walk? Write them down in a journal? Throw rocks into the pond?

Do: Congratulate yourself for being a writer who does writerly things such as getting other eyes on their work.

Do: Give yourself a gold star!

