Tips for starting and maintaining a writing group

1. GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER IF YOU DON'T ALREADY
    - You might want to exchange short bios, your present writing goals, etc.

2. AGREE ON THE PURPOSES/GOALS OF MEETING
    - Possibilities include feedback only, having time to write together, both

3. AGREE ON FREQUENCY/ DATES OF EACH MEETING
    - What days and dates work best for the members?

4. AGREE ON STRUCTURE OF EACH MEETING
    - Process, time, etc.
        - How many documents will you discuss at a meeting?
        - How long will there be for each person to give feedback?
        - How will rotation of work be conducted?
        - What maximum page limit will you set?
    - The author: It can be useful for the author to introduce the work briefly (e.g. history, journal, concerns) and then to listen only, with no need to respond – in other words, to eavesdrop on a conversation about the work. The group may agree that after a while the author may join the conversation.

5. AGREE ON ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES
    - Who will, for instance, be responsible for:
        - Arranging logistics, e.g. arranging meeting place and time, notifying others?
        - Facilitating the meeting, e.g. ensuring an 'agenda' for meeting and that documents have been circulated?
        - Note-taking?
    - How frequently, if at all, will roles change?

6. AGREE ON PREPARATION FOR GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK AT EACH MEETING
    - How will work be submitted (e.g. email, Weblearn)?
    - What guidelines can you agree for seeking and providing effective feedback?
        - The author will be seeking advice: What should the author/ submitter do to help the readers (see 7 below for suggestions)?
        - Readers will be giving feedback orally in the meetings; what should they do to help the author (see 8 below for suggestions)?
        - You may agree on giving feedback in written form. Preparing written feedback can be helpful for the reader in organizing ideas, but it also means that the writer does not have to focus on note-taking during the discussion. If you agree to give written feedback, questions you might discuss include how you will make comments (e.g. comment boxes? track changes feature in Word?)

7. AGREE ON AUTHOR RESPONSIBILITY
    - Think about your personal goals. What do you want to achieve from this writing group meeting and the writing experience? Re-visit your goals each time you have the opportunity to receive feedback. Perhaps you will submit something new each time or continue to revise the same piece for a while. This is up to you.
    - Submit something important to you. Choose a piece of work that you are thoroughly interested in – remembering to keep it within the agreed maximum length.

- When you send the document to the others, tell them
  - the goal of the writing;
  - the potential readers;
  - why you would like to re-visit this work and where you see it going (e.g. for publication, for your thesis committee to read, for a course etc.);
  - the kind of feedback you are particularly looking for; and
  - if you provide a section of work, make sure to contextualize it by providing some background information on the topic so that it is easier for the reader to enter into the text.

8.   AGREE ON READER RESPONSIBILITY
- Critique the writing not the writer. The focus of the feedback should be directed at elements of the paper to be improved based on your experience as a reader (rather than what the writer did or didn't do). For instance, "I really liked this section but had difficulty understanding the concluding paragraph; what role did you see it playing?" In other words, begin your sentences with 'I' not 'you'.
- Say something positive and if the author has asked for specific feedback, focus principally on that. It's important to respond to others' work by commenting on the good parts of the writing as well as parts to improve. Be explicit about what is successful.
- Be specific when giving feedback. Provide examples of how the individual can improve a point and give your idea of how it can be changed.
- Carry out your responsibility to the author and group: If you cannot complete your feedback before the meeting, attend anyway and let the person know when you will have feedback completed.

Overall principles

9.   TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE FACT THAT GROUP MEMBERS MAY NOT BE KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT EACH OF THE PARTICULAR FIELDS REPRESENTED IN THE GROUP.
- Areas of work may be different, but the disciplinary cluster provides some common ground. While it can be challenging sometimes to not know the field, it can also be useful in being positioned as a more novice reader since you will notice things an expert won't, e.g. an unstated assumption.

10.   ENJOY THE PROCESS!
- The writing group should be a mutual give-and-take. Improving your writing is facilitated by getting feedback but also by giving feedback. Through this process, you will develop a better understanding of how well you are able to communicate your ideas. The experience should provide you with the tools to improve your own writing technique and the ability to critique other scholarly work. Knowing how to respond to others work is an essential skill in academia.