**Handling Feedback on Your Fiction**

**You wrote a story, or part of it, shared it, and received feedback on your work. Now what do you do?**

It can be hard to read constructive comments on work that you’re proud of, but getting and using feedback is an important way to grow as a writer. Every writer gets feedback from peers, mentors, and editors. Even books by famous writers went through many stages of editing and revision before they were published.

But how do you know whether the feedback is helpful? What do you do when you get feedback from one person that contradicts feedback from someone else? And how do you manage all your feedback to make sure you’re making your story better, not worse?

**Managing Your Feedback**

**Remember that you’re in charge.** No one else knows your story like you do. The feedback you’ve received are suggestions, not commands.

**Understand that feedback is about only the words on the page—not you.** Reading criticism of something that you worked hard on and love isn’t easy. But remember, you wrote the words, but the words aren’t you.

**Read through all the comments about your story before you start making changes.** You may agree with some comments and disagree with others; some of them may leave you uncertain. Some of them may even conflict with each other. Consider all comments with the story you want to tell in mind. Remember, you can use some, all, or none of them when you revise your story because you’re in charge.

**Divide feedback into line editing and structural concerns.** Line editing includes notes about spelling, grammar, tightening up wordy sentences, and so on. Leave all that for the final stage of your revision; don’t waste time fixing the spelling in sections you may end up cutting or changing. First tackle any issues with your story’s structure: plot holes, pacing and tension, character arcs, worldbuilding. You can read a little more about story structure [here](http://fairwoodwriters.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html).

**Using Your Feedback**

Some feedback can feel off-base, but sometimes feedback feels just right and helps you fix something you sensed was a problem but couldn’t define on your own. That’s the best kind of feedback because it can feel exciting to solve a lingering problem.

Remember, the feedback you get is only that person’s opinion—but at the same time, when more than one person suggests that a particular part of your story isn’t working, you should give that more weight. Even if you get suggestions on how to fix that aspect of the story, ultimately it’s your decision how or even if you change anything.

When we write a story, especially in the first draft, we don’t always include all the pieces of it that are in our heads; as the creators of our story universes, we know all the details and backgrounds—advantages that our readers don’t have. When considering feedback, start by looking for places where you’ve confused these first readers so that you can add clarifying details and smooth out tangles when you revise.

The feedback that you agree with is the easiest to use, but what about the parts that you disagreed with when you first read through the comments, or the parts that you weren’t certain about? Don’t dismiss them automatically, unless they really don’t work for the story you want to tell. Sometimes you may need to step back and think about whether that comment is a hard truth that can help improve your story. Sometimes a comment still doesn’t work for your story, but instead leads you to a new idea that makes your story even better.

Constructive feedback is all about helping you write the best story you can—and learning aspects of writing craft along the way that you’ll be able to use in future stories. Ultimately, you, as the writer, are in charge of what feedback you use and what feedback you discard.