

Reader to Writer dictionary

The following are some of the reasons a reader could respond to a book in certain ways. These are possibilities, not exact translations. The reader's tastes, mood, energy level, and many other factors can change their perception of the writing. As with critique on your own work, look for patterns in feedback.

- **“It felt rushed.”**
 - Look for: Inciting incident coming before we know what's going on, In media res opening without followup/consequences. Unearned setups (sudden romance, deus ex machina problems or solutions, coincidences, convenient secrets, etc.). Underdeveloped characters. Non sequiturs in the plot (or the plot progression doesn't follow logically). Random chance propelling plot/action. Insufficient motivations. No slack or rest points between action (no variation in quick pace). No dilemma or deliberation phases before next decision or action taken. Not enough internality or emotion from important characters.
- **“It felt slow.”**
 - Look for: Too much backstory or before picture. Inciting incident too far from beginning, or action before inciting incident isn't necessary/doesn't lead to inciting incident. Lots of exposition, wordiness, purple prose, explanation, or description (scene, character). Not enough conflict or tension. Too much deliberation. Character arc not progressing/character too slow to change or learn/keeps making same mistakes with no change/consequence. Passive protagonist. Too much showing when telling would be better, or showing then telling. Undead darlings, extraneous scenes, or chapters that start too early or end too late. Repetition. Missing clear goal or stakes/stakes not escalating or conflict not increasing. Too much downtime or reflection between conflicts.
- **“I hated the ending.”**
 - Look for: Final conflict resolved too quickly/easily for the setup, no emotional closure or reaction afterwards. Plot threads left unresolved. Major conflict resolution happening after the book is over. Rewards for overcoming stakes not fully realized (or emotional arc not complete). B-story or twist not necessary for resolution. Characters' growth wasn't necessary in order to triumph or didn't leave them satisfied/optimistic in spite of failure.

- **“I couldn’t connect with the characters.”**
 - Look for: Too many characters/names up front, too many similar or unfamiliar names, too many character insights at the same time. Cliched character flaws or quirks (esp, that don’t contribute to story). Not enough relatability/reason to hope for them (must have logical motivations we can empathise with. Doesn’t need to be likeable), Not enough voice/personality, internality, or emotion from characters. No clear goal/stakes, or story is happening to passive characters rather than characters making choices that drive the story. Dialog is stiff or for the reader’s sake: “As you know, bob...”
- **“It was confusing/frustrating.”**
 - Look for: Not enough/illogical character motivation, obtuse characters, characters holding back secrets for no reason, POV issues, too many indistinct characters or locations, plot holes, inconsistent rules (worldbuilding, magic or scientific systems). Not enough clues or foreshadowing for readers to follow and anticipate choices or turns (too predictable=too many clues or it takes too long to get to the next turn, followed tropes too closely, too much foreshadowing, not enough misdirection. Not predictable enough=too few hints, motivations, patterns or foreshadows). B-story not tying into or enhancing main plot
- **DNF (did not finish)**
 - Look for: Easy-to-close chapter endings (chapter goals complete with no complications/conditions, or chapter conflict/tension is resolved or there is an easy/obvious solution with no hint of future action). Too many questions before the reader cares about the answers, or too much mystery before the reader feels grounded in the story (keeping too many secrets), tension between characters persists too long without give and take or glimmers of resolution. No decisions made, no course plotted, no disaster, no sense of unease, unsettling worry, or unfinished business to deal with at the end of chapter, or no hint that positive change is possible. No clear character goals/stakes, obstacles seem too easy, or character isn’t endearing/we don’t care whether they win.

Five Main “Stays” of a Successful Book Club

- **Stay True**
 - Find the “why” of your book club and stick to your intentions for its creation. Keep the group’s mission in mind while you’re creating rules and agendas
- **Stay On Target**
 - Talk about the book, and if the social aspect is also part of your why, schedule time for that, too.
 - Designate a timekeeper, date keeper, and/or someone to help keep the group on track who everyone knows is just doing their job.
- **Stay Organized (macro and micro)**
 - Nail down a structure and stick with it. Changes should be official and agreed upon.
 - Designate a clear leader, and other positions if necessary (even if the group is a collective democracy). Someone needs to keep track of schedules, rules, and agendas, and run votes, give reminders, etc. Work position changes or term limits into the rules.
- **Stay Fresh**
 - Keep your membership healthy by inviting new members before others move out or drop. Fresh faces and opinions can energize a club.
 - Don’t be afraid to shake things up and try new formats, genres, styles, locations or whatever needs freshening, and stay open to reverting changes that don’t work.
- **Stay Safe**
 - Set expectations right away for how the club will operate, and brief new members before their first visit so they know what they’re in for.
 - Respect the time of all attendees and the space and preparation of the host by sticking to expectations within each meeting (time limits, topics, agenda)
 - Teach members how to disagree and be disagreed with one another with tact and respect. (I feel statements,, find common ground, acknowledge the merit in other opinions, etc.)
 - Remind members that the discussion is about the book, not about the members. Their experience and the lens through which they see the world is unique to each person.
 - Seek first to understand, and then to be understood.
 - Know names.
 - Acknowledge who’s there and who’s missing, and know who might need a text (distractable), or who might need a direct invitation (shy, unsure).
 - Know who needs an opening to join the discussion (introverted).
 - Know who has what allergies and sensitivities and have options for them if providing snacks or prizes.
 - Know which hosts don’t mind members chatting until 2am and which need everyone out of their house by 9.
 - Know when plans should change (someone needs support in crisis)

Book Club Format Options

- **Who**
 - How many people (is there a cap)?
 - Who is the leader?
 - Are there other rules (timekeeper, secretary, etc).
- **What**
 - What genre(s) or themes?
 - Will these change? Is there a limit to repeats of certain genres (no more than 2 WWII novels in one year, up to 3 non-fiction, only one self-help, etc)?
 - Any themes, spice levels, or other content your club won't read?
 - Are books chosen by hosts, by the leader, by vote...?
- **When**
 - How often will you meet
 - Are dates and start and end times consistent, or chosen by hosts?
 - Do you skip for summer/July/December?
 - Are there special meetings for book movie nights, club milestones or holiday parties, book choosing meetings, read-what-you-want month, etc? Where- one place, public place, many places, online (discord, facebook, zoom, etc)
- **Where**
 - Will you meet in a cafe? Park? Library? Home? Host's choice? Online?
- **Why**
 - TALK ABOUT THE BOOK ;-) But don't forget to allow social time if it's important.
- **How**
 - What does your agenda look like?
 - Example: My book club has a social time while everyone is arriving. About 15 minutes in, we take a quiz on the book and then score and hand out prizes. Then we grab food and discussion questions and either read questions in order or go around the room asking questions while everyone who has an opinion chimes in. We inevitably veer off topic, but we nudge each other back and there's more social time after we get through the discussion questions.

Book Club format examples from existing clubs

- Library book club hosted and run by a librarian (often there are options for different age groups)
- School Book club run by teacher or students with teacher sponsor
- Themed book club (Romance, Scifi, YA, etc).
- Buddy reads book club (informal, 2-4 people, short lunch discussion, for example)
- Craft book club where writers read a popular novel or a craft book and discuss lessons and insights
- Online book club hosted by a bookstore or publisher (often features discounts on featured books)
- Online private book clubs (as an excuse to keep in touch with friends in far places)
- A group of book nerds gets together every month and talks about whatever book each of us happens to be reading at the time. The only assignment is to read.
- Book movie club: Read books which were made into movies and then watch the movie together and discuss
- Audiobook club: listen to a book. Discussions include the narrator and their performance.
- Silent Book Club: friends gather to read in silence for a time followed by either discussion of the book so far, whatever they're reading if not all are reading the same book, or simple socialization about anything. This is good for those for whom it's difficult to schedule time to sit and read.
- Issue book club: read fiction or non-fiction or both about certain issues and dedicate a certain time period to volunteering for or supporting that cause.
- Mommy and me, father daughter, partners, or other grouped book club designed to help strengthen bonds and socialize with similar groups.
- Church book clubs to create opportunities for bonding, fellowshiping and belonging between members outside of church context.

Thank you for attending my class! Ask me anything: taryn@skipperbooks.com

In my newsletter, creative guests and I share funny, awkward, or embarrassing stories, book news, and nuggets of advice and wisdom. Read or subscribe at TarynDoingItAllWrong.Substack.com