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**In Conversation with Harold Rhenisch**

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*In May 2004, poet **Harold Rhenisch** agreed to an email conversation about the challenges writers-in-residence face during the exchange between seasoned writer and emerging writer.*

*Rhenisch advises writers on what to do when participating in a professional critique, how to submit your best work, alongside works-in-progress, in order to gain the most from the opportunity of working with an established writer.*

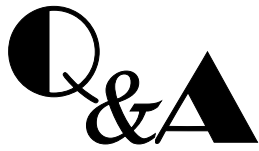
**Q** What are the most common mistakes made by writers submitting their work?

**A** They don't make mistakes.  
There are points where they could use some guidance, though.

These include: working around using dialogue to represent the author's point of view, writing dialogue with a sense of dramatic situation, not starting too soon, not ending too late, giving enough detail, seizing the exciting opportunities that spring up, learning to eschew meaning.

**Q** What makes the process frustrating for you?

**A** It is not frustrating.  
Some things that make it less than it could be are: not enough time, especially for one-on-one, some students who find it hard to let go of their preconceptions, some students who do not complete assignments.



# *Writers in* **Residence**

## **What makes a successful writer/WIR relationship?**

Mutual respect and trust and a willingness on both sides to commit time and energy and to go with the flow.

## **How can a writer submitting work make your job easier?**

Double space prose. Single space poetry.  
No capitals on the beginning of a line.  
Submit work in advance of the residence.  
Stay within length limits. Don't submit too little.

## **What's the best experience you've had as a WIR?**

Having an entire class of 12 in 9 genres all take a great leap forward in one week.  
Humbling. Exciting.

## **Would you further explain your comment about students who “find it hard to let go of their preconceptions “about their own work”?”**

I just mean that when you're a writer, and especially a beginning writer, it is hard sometimes to let go of one's preconceptions about one's writing in order to see it from another's eyes (even if they're your own) and to benefit from that. Human nature.



# *Writers in* **Residence**

**You've never found the process frustrating?**

OK, it's a little frustrating when writers don't put their energy into the exercises, but, hey, it's their dime, so if that's what's happening, my goal is to change what I'm doing. I'm there to offer something to them. The work is to figure out what works best for them. It's usually there somewhere and not that hard to find, really.

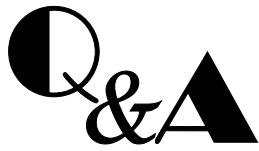
**I have had wonderful experiences as a writer submitting work to writers-in-residence, but now I see that some of the earlier work I submitted for editorial comment was really, work in draft form.**

**How does submitting rough work affect the evaluation process?**

Unfinished work, or writers not sending their best work likely makes the process a little daunting.

**How does sending their best, followed by works-in-progress, or first drafts, help you see the extent of the writer's ability?**

It's not hard to see the extent of the writer's ability, and most writers make errors in the same places. What is exciting, and which makes up for everything, is to see the new possibilities opened up in the work of new writers. That's worth a lot.



# *Writers in* **Residence**

**Do you approach the work of emerging writers and more established writers the same? If not, how does your approach differ?**

Sure. Same. More or less. With more established writers one can get far more quickly into far more technical and difficult and subtle points, but, do remember, that this level of difficulty is the same for the writer, whether the writer is a beginner or a master, so it's not really all that different.

**Writers-in-residence often participants to name their favourite authors, or ask for a list of interests and writing experiences, as well as writing goals.**

**How does this help with the evaluation process?**

It lets me see what a writer is trying to do, so that I can tailor what I do to what they are trying to achieve. After all, it's partly a process of my seeing past my own preconceptions so that I can best help them to be not me but themselves