

The Universe of Support

How a Writer Can Build a Team to Support Them

By Jennie Nash, Author Accelerator CEO

As a writer, you need to be discerning about who sees your work, when you choose to share it, and what you hope to get out of sharing it. In other words, you need to be intentional about your universe of support. It's one of the simplest things you can do to ensure that you will finish your work and finish strong—yet most writers make costly mistakes.

Mistake 1: Assuming Family Members Will Support You

You may think to use your family members for support, especially if you are new to writing. You write a few fragile pages, then hand them off to your partner or lover or mother, holding your breath, waiting for supportive words of encouragement or advice on how to move forward—but those things don't come. Instead, you some version of the following:

- **Empty praise.** The person who loves you says something like, “It's so cool you're writing a book. This is awesome. Keep it up.” The praise is so vague and empty that all you can think is, “Did they even read it?” This is not good for your relationship or your writing.
- **No respect.** The person who loves you says something like, “Oh, I meant to read it, but then I got to eating that chocolate cookie dough in the freezer and I ended up taking a nap instead.” This goes on for weeks, until you are so furious that you yank your pages back, and the person who loves you doesn't even notice how disappointed you are.
- **Hurtful criticism.** The person who loves you says something petty or mean or hateful about your work and it's not necessarily because they are petty or mean or hateful, but because they're not qualified to judge it. Maybe they're not part of your audience. Maybe they don't know squat about the creative process. Maybe

they have no clue how to read a room with a writer in it. Either way, it doesn't help and it usually hurts—a lot.

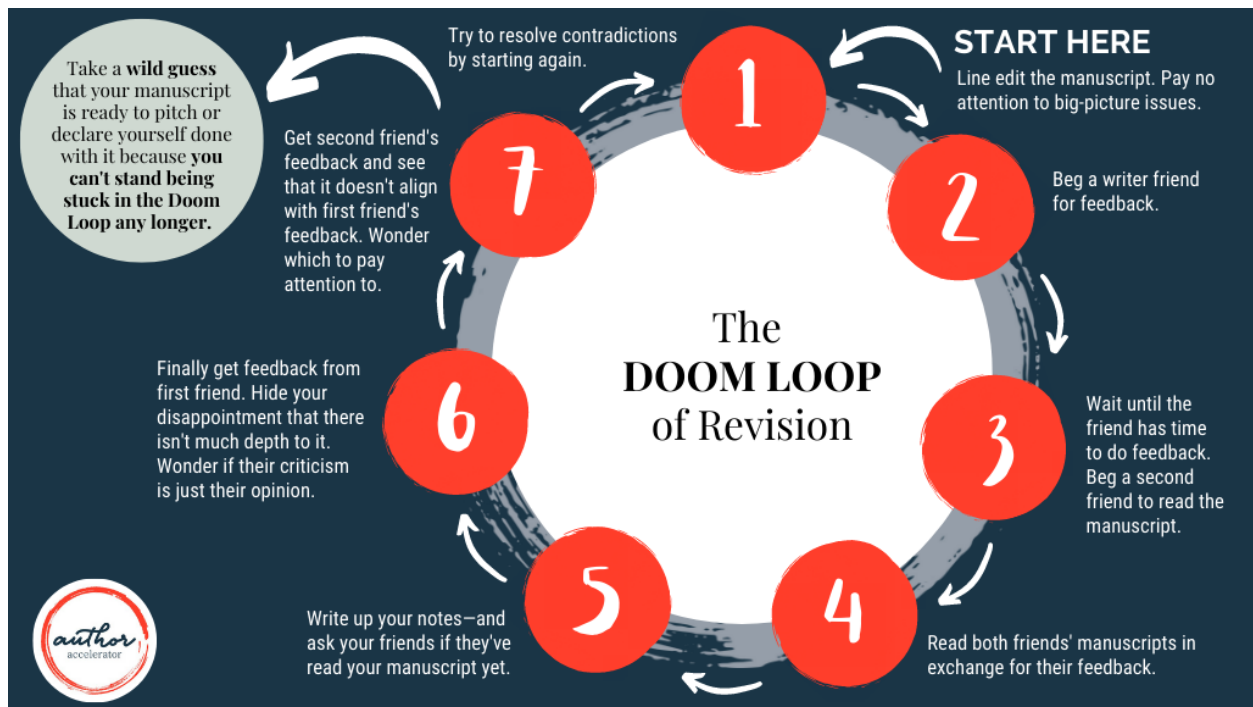
Family members love you, but they are often a poor choice for getting the specific support you need to do your best writing.

Mistake 2: Assuming Your Writer Friends Will Support You

It's natural to turn to other writers for support, and the community and camaraderie writers can offer each other is invaluable. After all, writer friends are writers too. They get what you are trying to do, and how hard it is. They can commiserate when you doubt yourself and cheer you on when you accomplish your goals.

When it comes to giving editorial and publishing support, however, the buddy system often breaks down. Other writers may be too busy with their own work to give you the depth of feedback you need, and even if they have the time, they don't always have the expertise to give evidence-based feedback, help you understand the marketplace, or work with you to develop an effective revision plan.

Worse still, the “payment” for having a writer friend read your work is that you are expected to read their work in return. This means you are spending valuable writing time reviewing other people's manuscripts instead of writing your own.



Too often, the result is that you fall into the Doom Loop of Revision. It looks like this:

Taking a wild guess about when your work is good enough to go out into the world, or feeling like you have no other option than to stay in the Doom Loop, quickly leads to frustration and doubt—the opposite of support.

Mistake 3: Refusing to Ask for Support from Anyone

You may think the best way forward is to circle the wagons and not show your work to anyone, ever. Maybe you tell yourself that there is pride in going it alone. Or maybe you tell yourself that having other eyes on your work is overrated, anyway.

This kind of isolation can work for some writers, but it tends to be terribly lonely, and you're missing the power of feedback, brainstorming, collaboration, and seeing how your work impacts an actual reader. That means you're missing the foundational point of writing a book, which is to connect with other people through your words.

Instead of pulling away, try leaning into the concept of support. Get clear about what kinds of support you have, what you need, and what you don't need.

PRO TIP: While you're at it, use your newfound clarity to understand what kind of support you can offer to your writer friends and what you can't. Be honest with them and with yourself. As Brené Brown says, "Clear is kind."

Step 1: Get Clear About the Kinds of Support You Actually Have In Your Universe

Use the full-sized blank "universe" illustration at the end of this document or draw your own. It's two concentric circles defining three spaces:

- A circle at the center of the universe
- A ring in the middle of the universe
- The space outside the universe

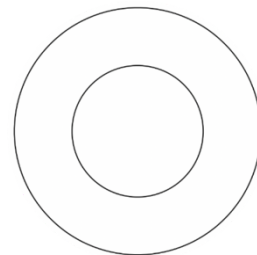
Think of everyone in your writing universe and place them in your universe of support map according to how much they actually support you.

The Center of the Universe

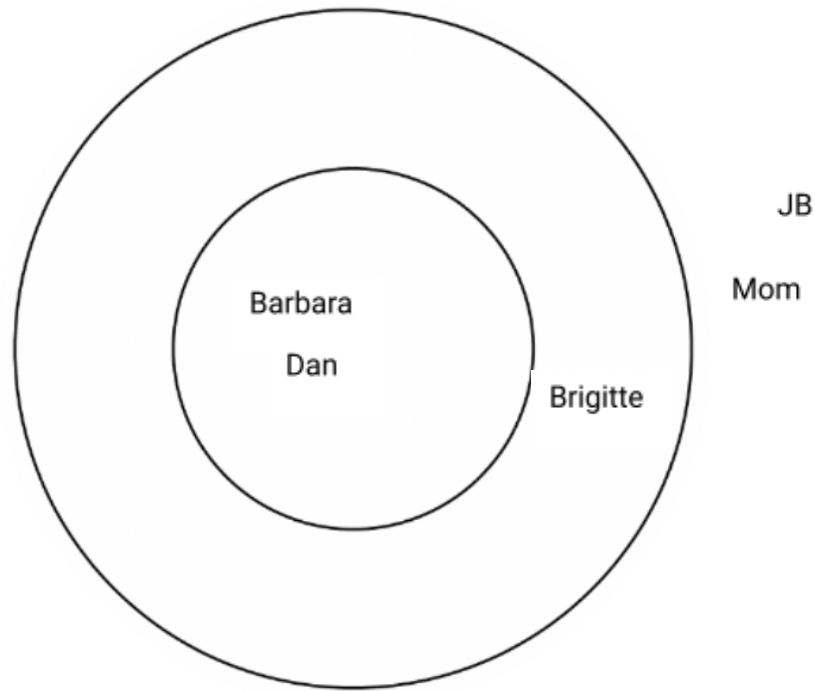
The only people who earn a place in the center of your universe of writing support are the people who you feel *unequivocally support you and your work*.

- If someone will read your pages with care, attention, and respect, and give compassionate, honest, evidence-based feedback, that is unequivocal support.
- If someone will admit that they are not your ideal reader and don't know how to help you with your words or ideas, but they ask how your work is going, help you protect the time you need to do it, and cheer you on as you go, that is unequivocal support.
- If someone will patiently listen to your doubts about your work and give you a writing workshop for your birthday where you can learn how to make better arguments or write better scenes, that is unequivocal support.

Note that this exercise is only effective if you are honest with yourself. Be discerning about that center circle; make it a high hurdle to get inside it.



In this thumbnail example, below, Barbara and Dan give unequivocal support. They are the rock of your writing life.



The Outer Reaches of the Universe

Mom and JB are way outside the universe of support; JB in deeper space than Mom. These people may love and support you in other parts of your life, but what their position in your universe tells you is that you should keep your work away from them at all costs.

- If someone says they support you but they make constant little digs and comments that make you doubt what you are writing, that is not support.
- If someone tries to talk you into having lunch every Friday instead of keeping your commitment to yourself to write during your lunch hour, that is not support.
- If someone loves you in every other way, but makes you feel embarrassed or guilty about how much time you spend on your work, that is not support.

It can be upsetting to put certain people outside of your universe of support. Give yourself some time to process your truth and remember that being honest will help you build a strong universe of support.

The Middle of the Universe

There will be people in your universe of support who are not in the outer reaches and who are not in the center. They fall somewhere in the middle ring. In our example, Brigitte sits in this middle position.

There is usually a reason why you put someone in the middle and it's enormously helpful to know *why*.

- Some people are very helpful at a certain stage in the writing process—perhaps you have an actress friend, for example, who understands what it means to audition and face rejection. She is great to talk to before you pitch, but not so great to talk to when it comes to sorting out your story structure.
- Maybe you have a sister in academia who is excellent at the nitpicky line edit stage, but who tends to trample all over your ideas when they are fresh and new. Saving her for the end of the project protects you from getting hurt.
- You may put someone in the middle of your universe for this particular project because perhaps what you are writing is too similar to what they are writing, and it becomes complicated to help each other. You can move them back to the center of your universe for the next project.

Step 2: Get Clear About the Kinds of Support You Need In Your Universe

Now that you know who you have in your universe, consider what kinds of support they provide and what kinds of support you need.

Start by writing the names of the people in your universe (the center circle and middle ring only!) next to the kinds of support they provide:

- Someone who can help you set goals for your career and your project
- Someone to help you understand the demands of the marketplace for your genre or category
- Someone who is great at book development – laying a firm foundation, determining the structure of your story or argument
- Someone to hold you accountable and keep you on track as you write
- Someone to share the regular ups-and-downs of the writing life
- Someone to talk to when you feel soul-crushing doubt
- Someone to talk to about issues of craft and help you improve your work
- Someone who is great at evaluating the effectiveness of a chapter and a complete manuscript with honest, evidence-based feedback

- Someone who is compassionate about the difficulties of the writing life
- Someone who is great at networking
- Someone who can help you with your relationship to social media (including what and when and where to post, why to post, and how to manage envy, FOMO and other dangers of social media)
- Someone who can proofread
- Someone who is great at developing pitch materials and an author website
- Someone who you can talk to about writing and money
- Someone who is great at developing a pitch strategy and understands different paths to publishing
- Someone who can throw a really great book launch party
- Someone who can help you plan a long-term marketing plan
- Someone who will encourage you to do it all over again
- _____

Where are you missing support? What kinds of support do you need? Once you know, you can look for the people and programs you need to fill in the gaps. If, for example, you realize you would like an accountability partner, you will approach meeting people at the next conference you attend in a different way than if you were looking for someone to teach you craft skills.

Get Matched With a Book Coach

If you find a lot of holes in your universe of support, consider working with an Author Accelerator certified book coach. We train our coaches to provide support throughout the creative process at every level a writer might need. Visit authoraccelerator.com to get matched with a book coach.

MY UNIVERSE OF SUPPORT

