What Makes a Helpful Critique?

Any thoughts or impressions you have as you review material submitted for critique could be valuable to the author. Try not to second-guess your instincts and first impressions. Say what comes to mind. If you're new to the critique process and are unsure what to comment on, here some criteria you might use:

- Any points of confusion, rephrasing if needed to clarify a section

- More description if needed to visualize the scene, or perhaps less description

- More human interaction if needed

- Tension may be sagging or too prolonged (many misdiagnosed story problems are really sagging tension problems)

- More or less action may be needed

- Pacing Problems: The story may drag or race too quickly at particular points

- You may feel bored overall, or at certain points

- Character problems: You may not care about a character or their situation. You may not feel a character's personality, motivation may be lacking for their actions, characters may not have goal/mission/purpose in the story, they may not be learning or changing. Characters may not be distinguishable from each other

- Things may seem implausible, e.g., this would never happen in this unique story world, or a character, as developed, would never do such a thing

- Plotting problems: Events of the story may not flow logically, they may not be compelling enough

- Say what emotions you feel as you read. The author may not have intended to evoke those emotions

- The author may "describe" the emotions of the character but you, as the reader, can't feel them

- Dialogue problems: Stilted, too obvious or 'on-the-nose', not fresh or unique enough, all characters sound the same, distracting use of dialect, slang, or cursing

- The command of the language/skill or quality of the writing or phrasing, etc. is poor

- Ineffective word choices or repeated words

- Spelling, punctuation, or grammatical errors

- Unintended changes or inconsistencies in Point of View or in past/present tense

- Also mention things that you love about the piece or that seem to work very well.

- Portions that are phrased beautifully

- Characters you love to love, or love to hate

- Sections that held your attention or had you spell bound

- Add your own criteria for comment as you read through the piece. Say what works for you and what does not.