

## Rules for Reading Out Loud

*Writing is like the inhalation. Reading out loud is like the exhalation. We often don't know what we've written until we've read it out loud. The impact of what we've said often doesn't hit us until we speak the words out loud. Being witnessed is an essential part of writing practice. I don't force people to read, but I strongly encourage them. It's good for you to step out of their comfort zone--but not too far out. Sometimes you can read to one other person, but not yet share in a bigger group.*

- 1. Don't begin your reading with an apology.** Take pride in your work. Don't say, "I'm not really a writer," or "I didn't finish this," or "I didn't follow the instructions." Just read the words on the page, from beginning to end, without any introduction.
- 2. Don't edit as you read.** Read from the first word to the last word without cutting out the embarrassing part in the middle.
- 3. It's okay to cry.** People often start to cry when they read out loud. This may be because they're taking in their own words at a deeper level. It may be because they're speaking the truth out loud. It may be because they're being witnessed by a compassionate listener. If you cry, it's fine to stop and cry. Then if you can, come back and read the rest of your piece.
- 4. If you're listening, only respond with a thank you.** Don't make comments. Don't chime in with your own experience. Listen with your whole self and then thank the person for the sharing. (If you're a therapist working with a client, it may be appropriate to respond).