USC Center for Excellence in Teaching

# Critiques

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

Considerations and ideas for implementing critiques in your course. This resource is applicable to various disciplines and modalities. Critiques might also be referred to as peer review, review, analysis, evaluation, assessment, appraisal, criticism, or critical commentary.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Refer to this resource when planning to use critiques in your course. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

### What is a critique?

A critique is a detailed, systematic analysis of a piece of student work. Critique is a signature pedagogy in the arts, but can be applied to a variety of disciplines. The students present or display work to review and discuss. The critique can be a learning activity and assessment that aligns with several significant learning goals such as critical thinking, verbal communication, and analytical or evaluation skills. It provides an excellent platform for faculty to model these skills and evaluate if students are attaining them. The critique also employs many evidence-based best practices including active learning, formative and/or summative assessment, providing targeted feedback to the student, and class community building.

### Considering the critique in your class

* What course learning objectives are aligned with a critique activity?
* At what time in the course would this approach be effective?
* Would the critique work best in an onground classroom or in the Learning Management System?
* Which materials and technology will be needed?
* Has a constructive critique been modeled?
* Will students be graded on their ability to critique, and/or their response to critique (such as incorporating ideas into a final work product)?

### Possible formats of critiques

* Self-critique
* Two students critiquing each other’s work
* Groups critiquing each member’s work
* Group critiquing one work
* Delivery of comments in-person
* Delivery of comments online
* Anonymous critiques
* Critiques by a visiting expert

### Types of assignments to critique

* Audio-visual assignments
* Writing assignments
* Thesis statements
* Presentations
* Performances
* Clinical procedures
* Websites
* Interviews
* Business plans

### Establish clear critique etiquette and guidelines

Setting a few basic policies or guidelines for the critique can promote community, encourage participation, and help students understand their role in the critique process. Critique etiquette can either be prepared by the instructor or created collaboratively by the class.

#### Example guidelines for receiving a critique

Listen without interrupting.

Do not take what the critic is saying as a personal attack, but as a suggestion for improvement.

Keep an open mind and resist becoming defensive.

Ask for clarification for unclear comments.

#### Example guidelines for providing a critique

Critique the work, not the creator.

Be objective, especially if the work is not in a style or genre that you prefer.

Don’t be vague; give specific suggestions for improvement.

Be polite; avoid harmful or rude language.

Use “I” statements (e.g., “I don’t understand your first sentence” rather than “It doesn’t make sense”).

Start and end the critique with a positive statement (e.g., “I think the eyes in your portrait are very powerful, but I think adding eyebrows would give it more feeling. This would enhance the already strong content of the work”).

Frame ideas, when possible, as questions rather than as statements (e.g., “How did you choose whether to include the illustration or not?” rather than “It was better with an illustration”).

Use neutral questions (e.g. when discussing lighting in a scene, “Why was it so dark?” is not a neutral question. “What ideas guided your choices about lighting?” is).

### Examples of critique prompts

Describe the technical strengths and weaknesses of the work.

Describe the works contextual strengths and weaknesses.

If the work has multiple elements, what are the relationships between or among them?

Identify some of the points of emphasis in the work.

Describe the expressive qualities of the work.

Does the work remind you of other things you have experienced/seen?

### Videos on the critique process

[The Design Critique](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vaVClpS5H4&feature=youtu.be), New School of Architecture & Design

[How to Critique](https://youtu.be/9neybpOvjaQ), The Art Assignment, PBS Digital Studios Resources

David Fawcett, [Creating a Culture of Critique](http://reflectionsofmyteaching.blogspot.com/2013/04/creating-culture-of-critique.html)

Ian Glover, [Critiquing: An Approach to Teaching and Learning](https://blogs.shu.ac.uk/shutel/2014/07/09/critiquing-an-approach-to-teaching-and-learning/)

Johanna Inman, [Teaching Through Critique: An Extra-Disciplinary Approach](https://tomprof.stanford.edu/posting/1406), National Teaching and Learning Forum, (February 2015)

[The Role of a Teacher in a Critique Lesson](https://eleducation.org/uploads/downloads/ELED-TheRoleoftheTeacherinaCritiqueLesson-0815.pdf)