

Writing and Tutorial Center

Participating in Group Critiques

Critique is an investigation and appraisal of your creative work. In critiques (“crits”), your work is assessed on how well it fulfills the prompt requirements, how the work is executed, and what the work conveys. Crits are meant to benefit the presenter along with the rest of the class; it’s expected for students to give each other feedback, not just the instructor. Crits can inspire new directions for your work at different stages of the process. While there will be diversity of aesthetic values and perspectives during crits, it’s up to you to synthesize the feedback in a way that is beneficial for your own creative process.

Here are some things to keep in mind when presenting and assessing work:

Take an active role in guiding the conversation; don’t be afraid to ask questions!

Write out some of your issues/questions before the crit.

Broad philosophical questions are less productive and are better suited to other contexts (e.g. in your journal, during a theory class, at a party).

Keep a notebook/sketchbook to jot down comments made about the works to reflect upon later. If notetaking during a crit is too complicated or stressful, consider asking a classmate to take notes for you.

People *may* make suggestions or comments which don’t resonate with the work. If this happens, keep in mind the information may be useful at another time, for another piece of work, in a different context, etc.

Give yourself time to set up and ask for help when you need it. Be sure to offer others help with setting up. Wherever possible, pay attention to the lighting and adjust it accordingly.

In crits, keep comments and questions focused on the work being discussed. Here are some key elements to consider:

Space

How do you experience the space surrounding the subject?

How could the illusion of depth be intensified?

How does the distortion of space amplify the meaning?

Focus

Where does your eye go first?

Is the piece unified or does something appear out of place? If something stands out, how does this affect the interpretation?

Movement

Can you sense a rhythm to the work; does it remind you of anything?

Is movement depicted or implied? Does it feel static and what effect does this have?

Color

Does the color(s) evoke any particular emotion(s)? What effect does this have?

Is there a dominant color? What creates a contrast? Is there an overall palette in support of the subject or in contrast? (e.g. pastel, earthy, fluorescent).

Scale

Does the scale suit the subject matter? If not, is this intentional?

How does the scale of the artwork affect the viewer’s relationship to it?

How can scale be played with in a way that supports the meaning/intention?

Crits can be anxiety inducing for both the presenter and the audience. Some constructive ways to start a dialogue about other people's work may be:

"I am struck by..."

"This feels [exuberant, melancholic, etc.]"

"I appreciate the variety of materials and textures."

"I see a lot of attention being paid to the formation of shadows."

While it's tempting to characterize a crit as "good" or "bad," the deeper purpose is to expand your understanding of a work and make sure the audience receives the ideas you mean to communicate.

Here are some examples of phrases to use and avoid when giving critique:

NOT SO USEFUL:

"This doesn't work"

"I don't like it"

"You did this wrong"

"Never do this"

"This makes no sense"

"I'd have done it differently"

USEFUL:

"Have you considered..."

"What if you tried..."

"I notice that..."

"My experience of this is..."

"One suggestion might be..."

"I'm curious about your thinking..."

"An area that works well is..."

"This could be strengthened by..."

"Something to explore might be..."

"What was your goal with..."

USEFUL PHRASES TEND TO:

Be specific

Ask questions

Offer constructive suggestions

Focus on the work, not the person

Acknowledge positives

Invite dialogue

Show respect for creative choices