Art Critique Etiquette

Critiques of artwork can come from a variety of ideologies and purposes, one interpretation being: Artists, viewers and mediators coming together to generate a conversation.

Rather than coming from a place of judgement, critiques are used for educating viewers on an artist’s process, understanding the intent of the work, or providing comments that strengthen an artist’s creative goals.

**Artist, Mediator, and Viewer Responsibilities**

***Artist (You)***

1. **Be prepared to be receptive**

As the subject of a critique, it’s important for you to be open-minded on being critiqued and be prepared to answer questions about your work and process.

See critiques as a way of refining your work and process. Whether the work you show is finished or unfinished, you can gain new insights into your work versus when you’re developing it on your own.

It can be nerve-racking to have your work seen in this type of situation, but know you are the expert on your own work and you have the skills and resources to represent your creative process in the best way possible.

1. **Approach critiques as constructive, not judgmental**

Don’t take all comments personally, some comments may be just valued judgements. Critiques are simply guidelines on how to express your ideas in different ways.

Feel free to ask questions at the beginning or end to engage more with your viewers. You can also start off the critique by opening up about your work and asking any questions you have about your own work so viewers can frame their comments within the context of your process. You can reveal as much as your practice you’re comfortable with sharing.

If you would prefer to sit back and listen to the viewers’ interpretations first, you can also do that too. Keep note of whether or not others’ interpretations match up with your intentions.

***Viewer (Person Critiquing)***

1. **Spend a couple minutes of observation**

As a viewer in a critique, start off by spending some time with the work. Look at it more than once, then look at it again and again. It’s okay if you don’t immediately grasp every theme an artwork has to offer. Begin your critique by identifying and commenting on a few themes, then guide it from there. Initial comments can be helpful in providing immediate, unfiltered feedback, but you can change your thoughts or understanding of the work with more than one viewing.

1. **Find something you can relate to with the work, from artist recommendations to personal comments**

If you’re having a hard time finding what to say, you can talk about how the work makes you feel. Does it remind you of a personal story or of a certain artist? Although, you should try to extend beyond artist comparisons so there can be more room to discuss the artist’s own process.

1. **Ask questions relating to the artist’s philosophy/creative process**

Try asking some non-opinionated questions, like “How was the work was made? Why was this material used”? Ask questions that can help you better understand the artist’s practice rather than comments on how you think the work should have been made.

1. **Point to ways the artist can better express their ideas through their work**

How can you help the artist further express their themes and ideas in their practice? Think of the process of a critique as discussing ways to help the artist express their ideas in a successful way, rather than recommending how you would change a work of art. Although what makes a piece “successful” can be very subjective, try to understand what themes the artist is working with and if the way they are expressing it connects with you. Rather than finding mistakes in the work, discuss ways to elevate the work.

***Mediator (Teacher)***

1. **Take the time to understand the artist’s**[**goals**](https://www.gyst-ink.com/life-planning-and-goal-setting/)**and intentions**

As the mediator, or facilitator, of a critique you want to make sure you understand the artist’s point of view, and guide discussions toward topics that seem relevant to the artist’s practice. For example, if an artist presents a short film on the topic of family and identity, you can put emphasis on why those themes are important in the context of art/film history.

1. **Guide the critique to progress through different topics**

A critique has the potential to go off-topic if the viewers get stuck on one aspect of the work, causing a standstill in the critique. Don’t let the discussion be fixated on one thing. Open up some new topics, or ask some more critical questions to guide the critique into a more meaningful discussion.

1. **Initiate the critique by making descriptive comments**

Opening with questions like “What kind of techniques were used to produce that work? Are there recurring visuals/motifs in the work?” can be good introductions in breaking down a piece. In the instance that you’re critiquing a dance performance, try asking about why certain dance genres were utilized over others or making note of where the performance took place.

**Putting it all together**

Any critique can be a unique, [learning](http://annacraycroft.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Craycroft-4Pedagogues.pdf) opportunity. Each person involved will have their own insight into an artist’s practice, which can lead to an endless number of new concepts to handy techniques that will help educate everyone involved. At the end of a critique, you should be left feeling inspired to dig even deeper into your creative practice. Whether it’s fine art or creative technology, use critiques to improve your work with purpose, direction, and self-reflection.