

# Teaching Tip Tuesday

## Critique

**Critique** is the principal avenue of understanding and evaluating creative works and providing formative feedback. When done well, critique, like coaching, can help students develop technical skills, change behaviors, and alter thinking in ways that improve overall performance. When integrated into curricular progression, students learn not only how to effectively critique the work of others, but how to learn from the evaluation of others and how to objectively self-assess. These skills promote personal and artistic growth. Although scholarship on the use of critique as pedagogy is limited, these tips may provide a useful framework for successful application of critique.

### Tips for effective Critique

#### 1. Setting the tone for constructive and engaged discussion.

- **Make the assignment goals and criteria for success transparent.** Making it clear what the focus of an assignment is helps to limit the topics for criticism. This will help to encourage students to take more creative risks.
- **Collaborate with students.** Viewing critique merely as a means of evaluating student work promotes an instructor-centered educational experience. Instead, focus on critique as a means of collaborating with a student to help them clarify their vision, goals, and technical prowess.
- **Keep the students at the center.** Ask students to reflect on their own work. Ask them what they think is working well, and what they think could be improved. This fosters student agency and provides a platform for the development of objective self-assessment. When providing your feedback, be sure to focus on positive attributes of the work in question, not just problems with it.
- **Articulate internalized normative expectations.** Critique often involves comparison to normative expectations and unacknowledged conventions. By making these more transparent, both in your critique and self-critique, you can engage the student in discussions of differences and encourage exploration of liminal spaces.
- **Include informal and formal critique.** Informal critiques of student work as the work is in progress can help to normalize the receipt of feedback that is not tied to grading/evaluation of student work. It may help to normalize the behaviors of asking peers for input.

#### 2. Dealing with the discomfort of careful scrutiny.

- **Encourage student explanation.** Because creative endeavors can be deeply personal, any negative critique can be devastating. Making space to consider the students' intentions is one way to demonstrate respect of the lived experience that students bring to their work and can help to temper the effects of negative criticism by fostering the student's sense of self-worth.

#### 3. Recognizing unsuccessful work.

- **Encourage forward thinking.** Students should reflect not just on what they might have done differently in a specific instance, but how they can use criticisms to improve future works.

Klebesadel, H. and Kornetsky, L. 2009. Critique as a signature pedagogy in the arts. Ch. 6 in [Exploring Signature Pedagogies: Approaches to Teaching Disciplinary Habits of Mind](#). Gurun, RA, Chick, NL, and Haynie, A, eds. Stylus Publishing, Sterling, VA.