



Critique Intro Guide

This guide is meant to assist in the introduction of critique into a classroom. The steps listed below are based on a process that was developed over the course of many years and informed by the experience of introducing critique into multiple college-level classes.

While this guide is tailored to a fairly specific audience the general steps as well as the approach of slowly exposing the group to critique and normalizing the engagement are applicable to a wide variety of audiences and can be effectively employed in many different types of classrooms and workplaces.

The Steps

1 Show students they're already critiquing

PROFESSOR + STUDENTS

2 Talk about things that "don't matter"

PROFESSOR + STUDENTS

**3 Critique the easy stuff -
Objective only**

PROFESSOR

**4 Ask them to critique the easy stuff -
Objective only**

STUDENTS

5 Discuss, define and demonstrate critique

PROFESSOR

**6 Show them how to critique the hard stuff -
Objective + Subjective**

PROFESSOR

7 Share your own stories

PROFESSOR

**8 Ask them to critique the hard stuff -
Objective + Subjective**

STUDENTS (GROUPS)

**9 Critique the hard stuff for them again -
Objective + Subjective**

PROFESSOR

**10 Ask them to critique the hard stuff again -
Objective + Subjective**

STUDENTS(PAIRS)

11 Let them decide

STUDENTS

STEP 1

Show students they're already critiquing

PROFESSOR + STUDENTS

This step acts as an ice breaker for the group and helps students to connect "critiquing" (which can seem daunting and negative) to "talking about stuff" (which they do all the time when they discuss movies, music, food, etc...). It is intended to show students that they already do a lot of critiquing.

LARGE + SMALL GROUP PRESENTATION - Students collect and share examples of designs that they like and that they don't like. Discuss in a large group and then in more detail in small groups.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring to class a page of examples of designs that they think are successful and a page of designs that they think are unsuccessful.

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Lay out all of the collected designs and have students spend time looking through their classmates work.

Have each member of the class leave a descriptive word on 3 other people's designs (until each student has received 3 descriptors)

Discuss as a group what you see and that this is a very simple version of critiquing

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Have students organize into small groups of 4-5 and discuss in detail what it is that they like and dislike about their own collected designs.

STEP 2

Talk about things that "don't matter"

PROFESSOR + STUDENTS

This step takes some of the pressure off of students as they critique by asking them to have opinions about work that is intentionally "low stakes". Students are asked to both present and respond to work that is clearly not important for the class which gives them the opportunity to give feedback without feeling bad about saying something negative and to receive negative feedback without feeling much attachment to their work.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: This should be fun and should feel very "lightweight". This assignment is often funny like: "Bring in 3 pictures that you take of individuals that all look like they belong together."

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Have students post all of their work in front of the class.

Start by discussing objective elements (correct format, size, number of photos, etc...) and remove options that didn't follow rules (prof does most of this).

Vote as group on subjective elements. Each student uses a marker to show the 3 posted pieces they think are most successful and the 3 they think are least successful.

Physically remove the least successful pieces based on votes

Discuss the process, what just happened, how students felt about the reaction to their work and how they would do things differently next time based on this experience

Use markers to write comments directly on student's work

STEP 3

Critique the easy stuff - Objective only

PROFESSOR

This step introduces students to the objective elements that can be critiqued in their work - things that are not connected with personal opinions. The professor critiques only things that were required in the assignment like size of document, font, required content, type of image, etc... Starting with objective elements makes it easier for students to feel safe showing and critiquing work. They are not being judged on their personal abilities or the quality of the work beyond bare bones requirements - just on if they follow the rules.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Post all students' work in front of class and have all students stand around work

Write this on board: "objective crit only - not subjective yet"

Professor goes through each design and marks up objective crit with red marker

Ask students to edit their work based on feedback

STEP 4

Ask them to critique the easy stuff - Objective only

STUDENTS

This step is a repeat of the previous step but now asks the students to do the critiquing.

It introduces students to the objective elements that can be critiqued in their work - things that are not connected with personal opinions. The students critique only things that were required in the assignment (like size of document, font, required content, type of image, etc...) Starting with objective elements makes it easier for students to feel safe showing and critiquing work. They are not being judged on their personal abilities or the quality of the work beyond bare bones requirements - just on if they follow the rules.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Small Groups

Have students crit each others work in groups

Write this on board: "objective crit only - not subjective yet"

Students go through each design and mark up objective crit with red marker

Ask students to edit their work based on feedback

STEP 5

Discuss, define and demonstrate critique

PROFESSOR

This step provides the students with an exhaustive definition of critique. The professor walks the class through critiques of multiple examples of work (both good and bad) and discusses not just the work but how to talk about the work. The professor presents and talks through critique guides from HowToCritique.com.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: None

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Presentation in which professor shows work examples and walks students through a critique of the work

Presentation of HowToCritique.com guides: Terms of Critique, Give a Critique, and Receive a Critique

STEP 6

Show them how to critique the hard stuff - Objective + Subjective

PROFESSOR

This step introduces students to the subjective elements that can be critiqued in their work - things that are more connected with personal opinions - in addition to the objective elements that were discussed in previous critiques. The professor critiques things that were required in the assignment (like size of document, font, required content, type of image, etc...) as well as weighing in on less clearly defined elements (like overall design approach, specific image choice, composition, concept, aesthetic choices, etc...)

This critique happens with the whole group and every student's work is critiqued.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Post all student's work in front of class and have all students stand around work.

Professor quickly critiques every student's work in front of class writing and making notes directly on the student's work.

STEP 7

Share your own stories

PROFESSOR

This step acts as a break for students who have at this point received a lot of critique on their work and allows the professor to share stories and examples of critique that they have received on their own work, how it felt to receive the critique and how that feedback affected their work.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: None

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Professor presents examples of personal work and discusses critique received on that work.

STEP 8

Ask them to critique the hard stuff - Objective + Subjective

STUDENTS (GROUPS)

This step gives students the chance to try out giving full critiques in a safe environment. They are organized into groups of 4 which allows 3 students to give feedback on one person's work at a time. This is important because it takes the pressure off of one student having to "know what to say" in the critique. If one person doesn't know what feedback to give they have 2 other students who can "cover" for them.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class and read HowToCritique.com guides: Terms of Critique, Give a Critique, and Receive a Critique and be ready to use in class

CLASS INTERACTION: Small Groups

Students form groups of 4-5

1 person lays out work and the others give verbal feedback and mark up the work with marker to critique both objective and subjective elements of the work.

Guide students in structure exercises that use content from HowToCritique.com guides: Terms of Critique, Give a Critique, and Receive a Critique to inform their small group critiques.

STEP 9

Critique the hard stuff for them again - Objective + Subjective

PROFESSOR

This step provides students with another chance to see multiple critiques being given in a short period of time. This is important because they get to see how a professor critiques a wide variety of work - some quite good, some really bad, some from students who have more experience, etc... Now that they've tried critiquing out for themselves they are not only more receptive to receive feedback on their own work but they are also picking up more specific and nuanced approaches to giving feedback that they can leverage in their own critiquing interactions.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Large Group

Post all students' work in front of class and have all students stand around work.

Professor quickly critiques every student's work in front of class writing and making notes directly on the student's' work.

STEP 10

Ask them to critique the hard stuff again - Objective + Subjective

STUDENTS (PAIRS)

This step is the first time students are asked to give an in depth critique in a one-on-one setting. They have now had a number of experiences giving and receiving critique and can pull on those experiences to comfortably approach what would have been a daunting task for some of them at the beginning of the class.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Pairs

Students split into pairs and critique each others work with markups

Halfway through this session have students change partners and continue with the critique

STEP 11

Let them decide

STUDENTS

This step happens near the end of the course which allows students to provide each other with much needed critiques on final projects that they are creating. At this stage in the class students are not only comfortable with giving and receiving critiques but they also see the value it provides and are usually seeking it out on their own. For this step students receive critique from each other in any format they wish.

PREP ASSIGNMENT: Students bring printouts of their assigned work to class

CLASS INTERACTION: Any

Give students an allotment of time to receive feedback on their work and have the class split up in whatever way they choose to receive critique