**DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE PEER CRITIQUES**

**Traditional vs. Online Environments**

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**“Photography in Social Media” online Sakai**

**One of the obvious problems with in-person critique sessions is that no one wants to say anything considered “negative” no matter how much I stress the point that criticism is a constructive and helpful endeavor. I tell them the process is akin to proof-reading someone’s written work. You are just pointing out the typos and punctuation errors. But it never seems to sink in so what occurs is either silence in the room or, when a student is pressed to offer an opinion, it is usually a superficial and patronizing one.**

**The online critique process on the other hand, allows for anonymity and distance. It can be compared perhaps to how the perceived safety of a car can bring out unbridled “road rage” in an otherwise passive and meek personality. The smartphone or laptop screen is merely an extension of a car’s protective frame. However, it is interesting that at the beginning of every online course the critiques look identical to those face-to-face, warm and fuzzy “be nice” versions.**

**In this session, we'll discuss the differences between face-to-face and online critiques, as well as methods to increase student honesty in critiques.**

* **Critique defined:**

*https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/critique*

an act of criticizing; *especially***:**

* a critical estimate or discussion
* a critique of the poet's work
* an honest critique of her art

*Critique* is an alteration of an archaic word that referred generally to criticism. *Critique* itself dates to the early 18th century and originally referred to a piece of writing that criticized a literary or artistic work. The words *criticism,* *critique,* and *review* overlap in meaning. *Criticism* usually means **"the act of criticizing" or a "remark or comment that expresses disapproval,"** but it can also refer to the activity of making judgments about the qualities of books, movies, etc. (as in "literary criticism"). *Critique* is a somewhat formal word that typically refers to a careful judgment in which someone gives an opinion about something. *Review* can refer to an essay analyzing a literary or artistic work, but can also sometimes imply a more casual or personal opinion.

**Course syllabus provision**  
There are many ways to talk about and assess the worthiness of a photograph. Should we be thinking about art? If so then formal aspects of accepted art photography aesthetics must be applied. Or was a photo created to amuse us like a Meme or a silly Selfie post? How would we assess the quality of such images? By the level at which they make us laugh perhaps? Sometimes photos are intended to provoke empathy or compassion like those Facebook images of sheltered pets, sadly looking up at us from behind the wire, begging for salvation. Some might be intended to lead us to appreciate nature, showing us beautiful landscapes that invite us to dream about being there.

Consider the many uses of “Profile” photos. There’s your Facebook profile photo, your Google Circles pic, your Twitter face, or your on-line dating and meet-up persona, not to mention your “professional” profile self. The list goes on and on.

Then there is the intent as to why we post our photos and just who they are meant for. Do we share to impress our followers with our photo skills? Naturally photos we share of family members are not for that purpose like a birthday party collage. You will be sharing with me for a grade, which means you want something in return for that. Do we share more often when we are lonely or when we are happy? And what about “SnapChat”? What primal urge is it actually satisfying? What societal function does it serve?

Perhaps ultimately the vast majority of social media photography is “evidence”. I am here. Look at me, and the things I do. I Exist! Please “Like” my evidence and please “share” it with others.

The shooting assignments and the readings are intended to explore many of these questions. When you look at the photos posted by your peers make an effort to not only see the content but the context as well. What does it mean that someone made a decision to frame only a single square or rectangle of their world when billions of alternative squares and rectangles were available? What were they thinking? What are they trying to tell us?

**Critique Instructions**  
Post critiques for each album of 3 fellow students in the Sakai Forums section. Every student must have critiques so make sure you look for a student who has not yet received one and comment on their work. Forum Topics are separated by assignment. Use the web source below as a beginner’s guide to effective photographic criticism along with any other criteria you deem appropriate. Critiques should be a short paragraph long (approx.150 words) per album. Make sure you refer to the assignment in your critique. Keep in mind to put into context the purpose and intent of the assignments. Try to answer questions that the photograph asks.

\* Score each album from **1**(lowest) to **10**(highest) using the following criteria:

* **Formal quality aspects like focus, angle, color, contrast, etc.**
* **Fulfillment of the “Intent” of the assignment**
* **Level of idea originality (satisfies literal requirement or goes beyond)**  
  Refer to your scoring and reasons for them in your critiques.

Use the following web source for a guide to effective photographic criticism and discussion.

**HOW TO PROPERLY CRITIQUE A PHOTOGRAPH**

[**https://fstoppers.com/critiques/how-properly-critique-photograph-82407**](https://fstoppers.com/critiques/how-properly-critique-photograph-82407)

## Sometimes, Artistic Vision Exceeds Technical Ability

## 2.) A Critique Is Not an Opinion

## 3.) Have a Purpose

## 4.) Speak to Your Audience

## 5.) It's Not About You

## 6.) Remember the Context

## 7.) Be Polite

## 8.) Stop, Look, Understand, Critique

## 9.) Start a Dialogue

## 10.) Too Positive? Too Negative? Ignore it.

* **Debate, Dialogue and Review: where does Critique belong?***“The Magic of Dialogue” by Daniel Yankelovich* [*http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/y/yankelovich-magic.html*](http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/y/yankelovich-magic.html)

**The Differences between Dialogue and Debate**

**Debate**

* assumes there is a right answer – and I have it.
* is combative – participants attempt to prove the other side wrong.
* is about winning.
* entails listening to find flaws and make counter arguments.
* I defend my assumptions as truth. I critique the other side’s position.
* I defend my own views against those of others.
* I search for weaknesses in others’ positions.
* I seek a conclusion or vote that ratifies my position.

**Dialogue**

* assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together, they can craft a solution.
* is collaborative – participants work together toward common understanding
* is about exploring common good.
* entails listening to understand and find meaning and agreement.
* I reveal my assumptions for re- evaluation.
* I re-examine all positions.
* I admit that others’ thinking can improve my own.
* I search for strength and value in other’s positions.
* I discover new options.
* **Using the subjunctive: would, could, suggest, recommend, propose, advise**
* [**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subjunctive\_mood**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subjunctive_mood) **Wikipedia**Subjunctive forms of [verbs](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verb) are typically used to express various states of unreality such as wish, emotion, possibility, judgment, opinion, obligation, or action that has not yet occurred…
* ***Negativity in “should”***

After many of the above expressions, the word **"should"** is sometimes used to express the idea of subjunctiveness. This form is used more frequently in British English and is most common after the verbs "suggest," "recommend" and "insist."

* **Peer critiques requested vs. peer critiques required**
* Requested peer critiques signify a person’s desire for feedback in order to improve their work.
* Required peer critiques are forced criticism and opinions directed at work by individuals. who do not necessarily seek to improve their work.

**Peer critique**, a specialized form of [critique](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critique), is the common practice of writers reviewing and providing constructive criticism of each other's work. Most fiction writers use some form of peer critique as part of their process of writing. [**https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer\_critique**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peer_critique)

**Concept Art Empire: How to Gather Valuable Online Critiques of your Artwork**

[**http://conceptartempire.com/gathering-online-art-critiques/**](http://conceptartempire.com/gathering-online-art-critiques/)

* **Challenges specific to peer critiques of “creative” works**
* Confirmation of, or affronts to, one’s talent and creativity.
* Student’s lack of confidence that the work is complete enough for criticism.
* Exceptional students are eager to offer criticism while others remain silent.

**Art school Critique 2.0 Symposium: Teachers College: Columbia University**

[**http://www.tc.columbia.edu/media/academics/ah/arted/symposiums/ASC20\_Program.pdf**](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/media/academics/ah/arted/symposiums/ASC20_Program.pdf)

# The Art Group Crit. How do you make a Firing Squad Less Scary? Networks: University of Brighton <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/projects/networks/issue-18-july-2012/the-art-group-crit.-how-do-you-make-a-firing-squad-less-scary>

* **Face to face vs. online peer critiques**
* **Familiar vs. unfamiliar:**

In-class social dynamic vs. faceless online community. Little difference observed initially.

Poor critique participation grades do not motivate most students in face to face classes to participate. Online critique grades do motivate participation more effectively.

* **Grade rewards vs. social repercussions**

The common goal of both face to face and online students is favorable grade outcomes. However, verbalizing an opinion in the presence of the student being critiqued challenges the social norms of likability much more so than in an online setting where written criticism of an unfamiliar student’s work is less likely to have social repercussions.

**Five Best Practices for Effective, yet Sensitive Critiques: Temple University Teaching & Learning Center**

[**https://teaching.temple.edu/sites/tlc/files/resource/pdf/5\_Best\_Practices\_for\_Critiques%20%5BAccessible%5D\_0.pdf**](https://teaching.temple.edu/sites/tlc/files/resource/pdf/5_Best_Practices_for_Critiques%20%5BAccessible%5D_0.pdf)

* **Competition based Criticism**
* **Winners and Losers**

Work of Art: The Next Great Artist, Top Chef, Project Runway, American Idol, The Voice, Dancing with the Stars.

* **Expert vs. peer criticism**

Expert criticism and judgements have consequences while peer criticism might not.

* **Work critiqued is presumed finished**

Student work is rarely presumed finished

* **Interesting Outcomes**
* Critique guidelines and peer value ratings are used to frame peer critiques but are implemented by students erratically.
* Original assumption of students is that their ratings and critiques will affect the grade of the student being evaluated resulting in highly favorable and patronizing critiques along with high ratings.
* Once students realize that ratings and critiques only affect the student offering them the ratings drop and the amount of criticism increases.
* Getting ratings in line with critique comments remains problematic.
* Instruction to place rating at beginning of critique rather than at the end prompted a more balanced analysis and justified rating.
* In online critiques the least articulate students often offer the harshest criticism while students displaying more critical thinking analyze strengths and weaknesses in a more balanced manner and provide well justified ratings.
* Re-do policy provides resubmission of work that has been improved by making changes based on peer criticism. Very few students take advantage of the policy.
* Inability to separate person from product. This occurs online just as often as in traditional face to face settings.
* Sense of community seems to remains strong among students in online courses.
* **Other factors to consider**
* Lack of Public Speaking experience affecting face to face critiques more than online.
* Social taboos: “If you can’t say anything nice…”
* Lack of confidence in one’s opinions may be symptomatic of insufficient knowledge of subject matter seems to especially affect face to face critiques.
* Effects of Social Media interaction dependence over face to face communication.

**Online peer critique evolution of one student from assignment #1 – assignment #6:**

**Assignment #1**

*Flash: The photo with flash enhanced the subject a little more than the one without. The subject is on the third of the screen and not right in the center which is nice to see. Overall i would rate this album a 10.  
  
Portrait: The subject being slightly turned is much more interesting to look at instead of a subject that is completely facing the camera. Even in the second photo the subject's shoulders are still not fully facing forward which is interesting. I rate this album 10.  
  
Zoom: Effective use of the zoom. The building is closer to the third of the screen so the focus isn't just in the middle of the photo. The color of the sky would allow for it to be cropped out in Photoshop and that opens up a lot of possibilities with editing. I rate this album a 10.  
  
Macro: The elephant is in focus and the background is blurred. It looks like you were very close to it and this photo meets the assignment requirements so i rate this album a 10.*

**Assignment #6**

*Hi //////, thanks for your photos. Here are my comments about your selfies.  
  
1. I rate this photo 8. These three smile faces are so warm. I can feel your happiness through these selfie pictures. However, this photo lacks creativity. If you laid on grass instead of the bed, your photo will be more colorful. Since this is the original one, you should use some colors to make it artistic without any filters.*

*2. I rate this photo 7. You used the black/white filter on this selfie. I feel you can do better if you can take this selfie through some other object such as a mirror or glass. Or you can put some decoration in front of the lens, and make the portrait blur. For the filter part, I do not suggest using a b/w for this one. If you like the b/w filter, I think the high key b/w filter would be better than this dark one.   
  
3. I rate this photo 7. I like your smiles, they look like sunshine. However, this photo is also lacking a creative idea. The way you took this photo is similar to the first one you have. I would like to see the use of some colorful filters to adjust the photo so that we can see the difference between the original photo and the one with filters.  
  
Thank you for giving us wonderful photos. I am looking forward to see more next time!*