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This critique process was developed for graphic design students but can be translated into other creative disciplines.

This is an abbreviated and updated version of a paper was published as "Functional Criticism: A Guide to Critiques in the Graphic Design Classroom" in the journal, *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal*, 4(1), 401-408"

Three important rules of practice:

Honesty. I ask my students to imagine a person in their mind: Paula Abdul. The desire to be supportive can make us shy away from the truth. It takes courage to be honest.

Respect. Simon Cowell. Sometimes in a critique we can get too involved and focused with what WE HAVE TO SAY. Respect takes mindfulness.

Curiosity. Homer Simpson. Homer once said: *Just because I don't care doesn't mean that I don't understand.*

Apathy. We have to become active detectives to figure out why, we sometimes feel like a Homer. Curiosity takes integrity.

What is Feedback?

There are two kinds of feedback: First there is: factual/technical feedback based on client needs, budget, timeline, requirements of the format and material limitations, etc. This kind of feedback is more black and white with more clear cut and finite answers.

Then there are value judgments: What is good design? What is great art? What is innovative design? These are opinions, sometimes strong opinions, which may be shared by many people in the field. Majority rules can have the deceiving appearance of a kind of a truth, but it isn't.

Before Starting the Critique

Once we have clarification regarding opinions and value judgments, then we talk about the steps of the critique:

1. I write on the blackboard: the critique criteria for the day. Under the three umbrellas of big picture (mountains), middle ground (trees), and details (leaves). I ask the students to fill in the gaps. I ask them, What did you think about as you were designing? What were you trying to problem solve? What perimeters did you have to manage? etc.

I have every single student contribute at least one criteria. At the end, we have a board full of vocabulary, goals, and objectives. Sometimes, naming the goals and objectives is enough for the students to have a sense of self-evaluation.

2. Then I have the students write notes on each of the students' work based on the critique criteria. I want the critique not to be reactive to whomever is the first to speak, or who is the loudest. I want every student to have a chance to form an opinion on their own with a moment to reflect about their own interpretations getting in the way of proper communication.

Functional Criticism: How to have Productive Critiques in the Creative Classroom.

Yoon Soo Lee

Starting the Critique

The Crit: There will be the first volunteer who will start the crit. Then the students follow the following protocol.

1. Hello, my name is (crit leader).
2. I will talk about (my friend's) work today.
3. The crit starts off with the strengths of the work. Agreements and disagreement follow.
4. Then comes the challenges. What needs more work? Why? Is it an opinion, preference or conventional wisdom that we are expressing? Agreements and disagreement follow with discussion.
5. Then the crit leader asks the designer if they have questions about their work.
6. Then crit leader asks, "Any final questions?" at which final comments can be added and additional questions may be asked. A pause has been important at this point for those last students who may have been holding back until now. At the end of this session, the professor may make final comments if they have not already.
7. We thank the crit leader. And the student whose work was just critiqued, step ups to the plate. They become the second crit leader and choose the next work to be discussed.

This process continues until all the students' work has been discussed. Many times the work gets picked all over the classroom. This gives us a chance to move around, feel our legs, relocate in the classroom and stay engaged.

On some occasions, the students choose to lead the crit on their own work so that they can be very specific about the kind of feedback they need. And other times, we break out into smaller groups and have smaller, faster crit sessions.

I am currently working on a manuscript "Functional Criticism: How to Have Productive Critiques in the Classroom". This book will address concepts such as learned helplessness, art direction as design education and how to teach self-efficacy.

If you want notification regarding this book, please send me an email at: yoonsoois@gmail.com