

What is a critique?

Critiques are part of a long-standing tradition of visual arts education. They are used throughout the RMCAD curriculum to evaluate your work, collaborate, and to learn to evaluate the work of others. Critique of your work should be seen as constructive feedback from classmates and/or your faculty member. The goal of critique is to establish and practice the vocabulary, principles, and elements of the techniques you are attempting to master. They are also a method of helping you communicate your ideas and processes as they relate to critical thinking.

Critiques come in two basic forms (1) in-progress or informal and (2) final or formal. In-progress critiques are a way of evaluating your work while you are creating it. You engage in dialogue as to how your work is progressing. Technical and design questions are addressed during this type of critique. In-progress critique provides a second opinion on the work that you have produced up to that point. The information that you learn during the in-progress critique can then be applied to improving your work prior to the final critique. You might think of it as a way of asking for feedback and making improvements. You will also start to understand the ideation of your project, which is the process of forming and relating ideas in the visual arts. The second form of critique is the final or formal critique. This type of critique occurs at the end of a project. It follows a format similar to the in-progress critique, but the feedback is intended to encompass the project as a whole, on its own merits, delving deeper into design, composition, process, and global concepts that may guide you in future projects. Remember, the number one goal of critiques is to help you grow as an artist.

How does critique differ from criticism?

It can be very easy to confuse these two terms, and to fear both critique and criticism when we are in the process of developing a personal aesthetic or design voice. Not everyone responds very well to feedback about their work. Criticism is the negative side of feedback. Criticism offers negative feedback about the work as a whole based primarily on personal taste. Through criticism, you learn what people do not like about your work. Through critique, you learn what works in your work, how strong or weak it is, and how you might improve it. Your faculty members at RMCAD engage in frequent critique exercises to help you understand the merits of your work, guide you towards improvements in specific areas, and help you develop technically and aesthetically throughout your RMCAD program. To criticize a work puts focus onto what you do not like about it. Criticism tends to be grounded in a decision by the viewer to like or dislike the piece. This type of judgment is usually grounded in personal taste and therefore highly subjective. Criticism tends to encompass the entire work, and therefore any useful feedback for improvement tends to get lost in the overall negative opinion delivered by the critic. With critique, the feedback is focused on how the viewer responds to decisions made by the artist or designer with the piece. Of course, learning what the viewer or audience does not like about the work can be helpful, but focusing solely on what doesn't work about a piece offers little information about what can be improved. You may be asked to critique a certain aspect of a work or to assess the work based on stated criteria. For critique based on criteria, you deliver comments about how the work meets the standards and what specific aspects of the work can be improved.

Tips for Delivering and Receiving Critique

- **Look at the work.**

Give the artist the time and attention to really look at the work. Pay attention to what you are seeing and respect the time that classmates have given to the work. Notice your visual response to the work. What do you see first? Is the color vibrant, dull? How does this impact my response to the image? Make notes, but don't come to conclusions while you are looking. If something strikes you as odd or out of place, consider it carefully before identifying it. If this is a matter of your personal preference or taste, consider not sharing this. Avoid making comments based on what you like or don't like. When given critique instructions by your faculty, use those in formulating your critique comments. Always be respectful in offering your critique. Critique feedback that is constructive and offers alternatives for the artist or designer to use for improvement is the best kind of feedback you can receive. Artists and designers should continually seek feedback for their work. However, it is up to each individual artist and designer to decide how to use that feedback, if at all. The goal of critique is to offer methods for improvement.

- **Listen to feedback offered.**

It can be difficult to receive critique when you are not used to this type of communication. If your experience has included more criticism than critique, you may be sensitive in listening to what anyone has to say about your work. Critique is an important opportunity to grow as an artist and designer, so be open to this feedback. Practice providing critique in a safe environment like a class or online class; with practice you will become more comfortable delivering and receiving critique.

- **Respond to critique.**

When your work is being critiqued, you have to decide what critique feedback will be useful for you and what will not be. You do not have to act upon every critique comment or suggestion for improvement. All feedback is not necessarily appropriate for you or the piece. You can decide whether to accept the critique feedback, and the person providing it does not have a say in how you use the feedback. Respond politely to all critique feedback. Allow yourself to hear the feedback and respond politely. However, it is important to trust your own intuition and your own judgment about your work, regardless of what others say about it. Stay open to feedback, but remember that you are responsible for bringing your own vision to light.

Remember these strategies:

- Stay positive and be open to feedback
- Ask why
- It's not about you, it is about the work
- Maintain respect and honesty
- Use comparisons sparingly
- Be specific in your feedback
- Remember the Elements and Principles of Design
- Understand the design approach and context when talking about your work
- Consider the context of the work, i.e. the goals of the project, the audience, background information