

PEER CRITIQUE

It is important that everyone participate in the process critique honestly and constructively. You will learn much about your own style and artistic vision through what you have to say about the work of others (and how they receive your comments). It is important that we make mistakes, say stupid things, and make the best of whatever is on our minds.

The word “critique” is not meant to imply criticism in the negative sense. It is meant to refer to “critical thinking.” I would add to that “creative thinking.” Because we are discussing each others’ work in process, instead of examining final products, our ideas are both fragile and flexible. We should seek to encourage and collaborate in each others’ creative processes, and we should hold each other to high standards of technical and creative rigor.

A u t o b i o g r a p h y T e x t D r a f t

Each small group will decide an order in which to read each other’s work. Before you begin, recognize that you may run out of time and schedule a meeting outside of class to finish critiques. You may opt to meet as a group with one of your writing tutors.

Step One

The Author reads their “Author’s Note” to the group.

Step Two

The author may either read their work out loud or have another group member read their work out loud for them.

(The value of this should become clear to you.)

First Responses (some reader-based questions):

Begin by focussing on any questions the author has, which they may have included in their “Author’s Note.”

Readers (listeners) share your FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

- What do you remember most?
- What details stick with you?
- Do you have a sense of a theme or a core idea emerging?
- What remains unclear to you that you thought you should know?
- What areas were confusing?
- What do you want more of?
- What was the best part?
- What surprised you?

Dig Deeper

•Characterize the author’s voice. “Voice” in writing is that element which lets us “hear” the author. It comes from vocabulary, the rhythm marked by commas and a variety of sentence-lengths, and the relationship the writer seems to have with her material. You might characterize voice by comparing it to other writers or to characters in movies. You might do it by reading a few lines out loud “dramatically” to call attention to effective use of voice.

Are there areas where the voice seems absent or weak?

In which parts do you feel most strongly that you are “hearing” the author, a sense of honesty, depth, attitude? If you can’t identify any, are there moments in the story when you would like to get more of a sense of the author’s voice?

Be as specific as you can in your responses. It doesn't help a writer when you say, "I liked it." Or "That was lame." The writer needs to know what specifically you liked and why. The writer needs to know specifically what doesn't work for you and why.

More Reader Based Questions:

1. What were you thinking as you heard the opening passage?
2. What did you expect from the piece based on the beginning?
3. What further expectations does the story give you? If you were writing this piece, where would you take it? If this piece were the beginning of a book-length work, what would you expect (or want) to come further on? What would keep you reading?
4. What questions do you have about the author's story?
5. What did the end of the piece do for you?
6. How might different types of people (different audiences) react differently to the story?

Criterion-based Questions

1. Does the piece have a core idea (explicit or implicit) or theme? If it does, is that idea/theme well developed and interesting? If it does not, does it need one?
3. Powerful ideas combined with rich details tend to make for strong writing. Identify powerful ideas and rich details in the piece. If there is a lack, identify areas for development.
4. Is there a beginning, middle, and end to the piece? (Identify them and how they relate)
5. Is it "full" enough... are there enough words on the page so that the reader feels well-oriented and "fulfilled," that the reader can easily follow the writer's train of thought? How does the writer accomplish this/what can the writer do to improve on this? Are there areas where it is "overfilled," where the details or number of words become cumbersome?
6. Comment on surface matters/style/grammar, etc.