

How to Critique Art



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Critique is an accepted and established process of orderly scholarly and public debate. In the fine arts and the humanities, and especially in writing, critique is influenced by the scientific method of analysis. Critique is based upon an informed opinion, and never upon personal opinion. Informed opinion is accepted as being technical knowledge, personal or professional experience, or specified training.

The term "critique" implied from Ancient Indian term "kriturq", meaning an opposite opinion or suggestion or argument.

In philosophical contexts, such as law or academics, critique is most influenced by Immanuel Kant's use of the term to mean a reflective examination of the validity and limits of a human capacity or of a set of philosophical claims.

This has been extended in modern philosophy to mean a systematic inquiry into the conditions and consequences of a concept, a theory, a discipline, or an approach and/or attempt to understand the limitations and validity of that. A *critical perspective*, in this sense, is the opposite of a dogmatic one. Kant wrote:

"We deal with a concept dogmatically ... if we consider it as contained under another concept of the object which constitutes a principle of reason and determine it in conformity with this. But we deal with it merely critically if we consider it only in reference to our cognitive faculties and consequently to the subjective conditions of thinking it, without undertaking to decide anything about its object."

Later thinkers used the word 'critique' in a broader way than Kant's sense of the word, to mean the systematic inquiry into the limits of a doctrine or set of concepts. This referential expansion led, for instance, to the formulation of the idea of social critique, such as arose after Karl Marx's theoretical work delineated in his *Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), which was a critique of the then-current models of economic theory and thought of that time. Further critique can then be applied after the fact, by using thorough critique as a basis for new argument. The idea of *critique* is elemental to legal, aesthetic, and literary theory and such practices, such as

in the analysis and evaluation of writings such as pictorial, musical, or expanded textual works.

The Feldman Method of Critique

The following steps—**description, analysis, interpretation and evaluation**— are the steps in a formal critique. It is called the Feldman method. It is an established critique method that has been used by students and professionals alike for over 50 years.

Please respond to the following sections in paragraph form, using complete sentences. Use the questions provided *as a guide* to provide you with information for your paragraphs.

Describe

This stage is like taking inventory. You want to come up with a list of everything you see in the work. Stick to the facts. Imagine that you are describing the artwork to someone over the telephone.

LIST

Name of artist

Title of work,

Gallery or location of artwork. Any other info that you have

If this is an in-class critique of your own or another student's work, simply list your own or their name. For example, "*This is a critique of Joe Shmo's self- portrait.*"

NOTE FIRST IMPRESSION

Make a note of your first spontaneous reaction to the artwork. By the end of the process you may understand your first impression better or you may even change you mind. There are no wrong answers.

Analyze

Try to figure out what the artist has done to achieve certain effects. You should refer to your first impressions and try to explain how the artwork achieves that reaction.

Q. Use the vocabulary you learned in class. For example, if you're looking at a chain-link graphic, you learned reversals, transparency, complementary or analogous color, etc.

Q. How are the elements of art (color, shape, line, texture, space, form, value) and the principles of design (balance, contrast, emphasis, movement/ rhythm, unity, variety) used in this artwork?

Q. What do you notice about the artist's choice of materials?

Q. What grabs your attention in the work? Refer to your first impression.

Q. Is there any relationship to the things you listed during the description stage?

Interpret

Try to figure out what the artwork is about. Your own perspectives, associations and experiences meet with "the evidence" found in the work of art. *All art works are about something.* Some art works are about color, their subject matter, and social or cultural issues. Some art works are very accessible — that is, relatively easy for the viewer to understand what the artist was doing. Other works are highly intellectual, and might not be as easy for us to readily know what the artist was thinking about.

Q. What is the theme or subject of the work? What mood or emotions does the artwork communicate?

Q. What is the work about; what so you think it means? Q. Why do you think that artist created this work?

Q. What do you think the artist's view of the world is?

Evaluate

This is a culminating and reflecting activity. You need to come to some conclusions about the artwork based on all the information you have gathered and on your interpretations.

Q. Have your thoughts or feelings about the artwork changed since your first impression? If so, how? What made you change your mind?

Q. If not, can you now explain your first reaction to the work?

Q. What have you seen or learned from this work that you might apply to

your own art work or your own thinking?