

Critique – First and foremost, a critique is not criticism. It is a thoughtful analysis of a work and is never meant to be taken personally. While no two people will experience the same reaction to a work of art, or interpret it the same way, there are a few basic guidelines you can follow to achieve a thoughtful, thorough critique. The basic elements of an art critique are *description, analysis, interpretation, and judgment*. We will talk through the description and analysis steps only in our first meeting. There is no one correct way to critique a work of art. Our goal is not to say whether or not the art is good but rather to learn to clarify your understanding and reaction to the art. By following these guidelines, it is hoped that you will be able to understand art better and use these guidelines to help better your own art.

Part I - Describing the Work

1. Describe what you see as if to someone who can't see it. Give the title of the work, artist's name, talk about the material choices, composition and color palette and exact size of the piece. Use neutral terms to describe the artwork. For example you might say "This is a small-scale portrait of a young woman, shown from the mid-torso up, against a dark background. She is clasping her hands in front of her chest and looking up and slightly to the viewer's right. She wears a pink dress, and a long veil that falls behind her head." Avoid using terms like "beautiful", "ugly", "good" or "bad". At this point, you're just talking about what you see, not judging the art.
2. Discuss the elements of the work. Now describe the work in more detail. Talk about the way the art uses these five basic elements of art and design starting with
 - a) Line – Lines can be literal or implied. Different types of lines can create moods or effects
 - a. Curved lines create a calming effect, while jagged lines feel harsher, or create energy
 - b. Rough sketchy lines create movement while smooth, solid lines feel planned
 - c. A group of figures all looking or pointing the same way can create an implied line that draws your eye in a particular direction.
 - b) Color – make a note of characteristics like hue (red, green, etc), value (lightness vs darkness), and intensity. Do the colors clash? Are they harmonious? Does the work use a variety of colors or is it monochromatic?
 - c) Space – this refers to the areas around and between the objects in a work. Focus on things like depth and perspective, overlapping of objects and the use of empty space vs space crowded with details. Does it try to create the illusion of 3D space and depth
 - d) Light – Light can look warm or cool, bright or dim, natural or artificial. What about the role of light and shadow in the piece? Does the artist try to create an illusion of light?
 - e) Shape – Are the shapes in the work geometric with straight lines and perfect curves or are they more natural? Is the work dominated by one particular shape?

Part 2 – Analyzing the work

1. This is where you discuss how the work uses the principles of composition. What do you think the artist worked hard at while creating this work?
 - a) Balance/Composition – How do the colors, shapes and textures in the piece work together? Do they create a balanced and harmonious effect or is it imbalanced in some way? What kind of balance has been used in the composition? Has unintentional symmetrical balance been avoided? Have foreground, middle ground and background been addressed? Has attention been given to both positive and negative space? Are there “dead spaces” in the composition? Does the work hold together and seem unified? Complete? Is anything jarring? Is the background too noisy or busy? Should it be simplified? Have the objects in the composition been grouped in varied and interesting ways? Is the overall composition excessively crowded or excessively empty? Does it serve any significant purpose?
 - b) Contrast/Relationship – Does the work make use of contrasting colors, textures or lighting? Contrast can also be found in the use of different shapes or contours, like jagged versus curved lines, or geometric versus natural shapes.
 - c) Movement – how does the work create a sense of movement? Is your eye drawn through the work in a particular way?
 - d) Proportion – Do the sizes of the different elements in the work appear the way you would expect?
2. Identify the focal point(s). Most works have one or more points intended to get your attention. Try to identify which parts of the work are emphasized – note which features jump out at you and keep drawing your eye back to them. Why is your eye attracted to this feature? Is the entire composition developed equally, or are there primary and secondary focal points?
3. Identify the themes in the work and discuss how the artist used the elements of design (color, light, space, shape and line) to express these themes. Themes might include things like a) the use of color scheme to give the work a particular mood or meaning, b) symbolism and religious or mythological imagery c) repeating images or motifs within a work or group of works.

- Information gathered and compiled from articles by Jane Davila 2008, WikiHow to do Anything, princetonal.com and complexcloth.com