

Design Critique Guide

Best Practices for Giving and Receiving Feedback

Whether you're giving or receiving feedback, the goal of critique is not to find flaws but to learn from the design and explore options, where it works well and where it could be improved. Every critique should advance the design and strengthen your collaborative skills. With practice, both giving and receiving feedback becomes a powerful tool for collective growth and design excellence.

Core Principles

1. Listen and Ask

- **As Author:** Listen to understand, not to defend. Ask follow-up questions if feedback is unclear or seems to miss your intent.
- **As Critic:** Engage in [active listening](#) first. Ask clarifying questions before jumping to solutions. Seek to understand the designer's intent, constraints, and goals before offering feedback. Questions are your most powerful tool – learn how to use it well.

2. Be Kind but Honest

- **As Author:** Accept honest feedback gracefully. Remember that kindly delivered criticism is a gift that helps you grow.
- **As Critic:** Balance constructive criticism with positive reinforcement. Acknowledge what works well before addressing areas for improvement.

3. Know Your Audience

- **As Author:** Communicate your experience level and what kind of feedback would be most helpful at this stage of your process.
- **As Critic:** Tailor your feedback to the designer's experience level and project stage. Consider their learning style and cultural context.

4. Say It, and Say It Well

- **As Author:** When something resonates as unclear feedback, ask for elaboration. Your questions might help the critic articulate their intuition.
- **As Critic:** If something feels off, mention it—even if you can't articulate exactly why. Be transparent about uncertainty and invite dialogue.

Before the Critique

5. Tell a Story

- **As Author:** Tell your work's story. Walk through your design decisions, constraints, and problems encountered to provide essential context. Use physical or digital props if it helps you tell your story.
- **As Critic:** Be ready to hear the full context before forming judgments. Ask about the story if it's not shared. Take notes, it never hurts to write something down.

6. Set Clear Objectives

- **As Author:** Reiterate your project goals and constraints. Define what specific feedback you're seeking and communicate your design's current stage.
- **As Critic:** Ask about the goals of the work if they're not clear. Understand what specific feedback is needed and what stage the design is at.

7. Share Work in Advance

- **As Author:** It can be helpful to give reviewers time to see and digest your work properly. Send out links to prototypes, sketches, or wireframes in advance.
- **As Critic:** Review shared work beforehand to formulate thoughtful responses. Come prepared with considered feedback rather than just gut reactions.

During the Critique

8. Have Grace

- **As Author:** Don't take feedback personally. Remember that critiques of your work are not critiques of you as a person. Recognize that misspeaking and misunderstanding are common, remember that most people are acting in good faith – always feel free to ask clarifying questions.
- **As Critic:** Frame feedback around the design's effectiveness. Say "This layout might confuse users" instead of "You made a confusing layout."

9. Be Specific and Actionable

- **As Author:** When feedback is vague, ask for specific examples or actionable suggestions to clarify what changes might help.
- **As Critic:** Provide detailed, specific feedback with concrete examples and clear suggestions for improvement.

10. Use the "Yes, And..." Approach

- **As Author:** Accept building on your ideas as collaboration, not criticism. Be open to evolutionary thinking about your work.
- **As Critic:** Build on ideas rather than shutting them down. Acknowledge merit before suggesting alternatives. But don't shy away from speaking the truth, even if it's a hard one.

11. Ask "What If" Questions

- **As Author:** Engage with "what if" scenarios seriously. Use them as opportunities to explore alternatives you hadn't considered.
- **As Critic:** Explore possibilities through questions like "What if we tried..." or "How might this work if..."

12. Reference User Needs and Goals

- **As Author:** Share relevant user research and business goals upfront. Redirect personal preference feedback back to user needs.
- **As Critic:** Ground feedback in user research, business objectives, and design principles rather than personal taste.

13. Give Space

- **As Author:** Ensure everyone gets a chance to contribute, especially quieter team members who might have valuable insights. Now is also your time to practice [active listening](#).
- **As Critic:** Be mindful of dominating the conversation and actively inviting quieter voices, even when you have a lot to say.

14. Differentiate Between Critique and Problem-Solving

- **As Author:** Note problems raised without feeling obligated to solve them on the spot. Schedule separate working sessions for deep problem-solving.
- **As Critic:** Identify issues during critique, but don't try to solve everything immediately. Suggest follow-up sessions if needed.

Receiving and Processing Feedback

15. Don't Defend—Listen

- **As Author:** Focus on understanding what the critic is communicating. Take notes and ask clarifying questions instead of justifying decisions.
- **As Critic:** Allow the designer time to process without demanding immediate responses to your feedback.

16. Look for Patterns

- **As Author:** If multiple people mention the same issue, it's likely valid. Pay attention to recurring themes even if you initially disagree.
- **As Critic:** Note when your feedback aligns with others'—this validates the importance of the issue.

17. Request or Provide Specific Feedback

- **As Author:** Guide reviewers with specific requests: what works, what doesn't, where you need input and suggestions.

- **As Critic:** Ask what kind of feedback would be most helpful if it's unclear. Focus your comments on stated needs.

18. Thank Everyone for Their Time

- **As Author:** Thank everyone for their feedback, even suggestions you won't implement. Appreciation encourages future participation.
- **As Critic:** Appreciate the vulnerability it takes to share work for critique. Thank the designer for the opportunity to contribute.

19. Capture Everything

- **As Author:** Document all feedback received, or designate someone to take notes while you present and listen.
- **As Critic:** Offer to take notes if no one is assigned. Share your notes with the designer after the session.

20. Distinguish Critical from Nice-to-Have

- **As Author:** After the critique, categorize feedback by priority. Clarify with stakeholders if priority levels are unclear.
- **As Critic:** Help identify which of your suggestions are critical versus optional explorations.

21. Close the Loop

- **As Author:** Share which feedback was implemented and explain why certain suggestions weren't pursued. This shows you value input and helps refine future critiques.
- **As Critic:** Follow up to see how your feedback was interpreted and what was implemented.