



Balancing Affirmation with Critique

“Rather than coming from a place of judgement, critiques can be used for educating viewers on an artist’s practice, understanding the intent of a body of work, or providing comments that strengthen an artist’s creative endeavors” (Oh, 2018).

There are times when we are critiquing students – or students are critiquing themselves in our classes. Here are some tips for balancing student affirmation with critique in the classroom:

- **Emphasize critiques are about the piece not the creator.** Students can feel that critiques are about them as people and not about the work they have created. Spend time with your students practicing critiquing works by someone not in the class to help them practice these skills.
- **Try the empathic critique approach.** According to Bartel, “empathic critique builds awareness through sincere inquiry and discovery.” Have students view classmates’ work, write down open-ended questions for the artist, and ask the artist the questions. Then provide time for the artist to respond to the questions. Only positive or neutral (not negative) questions can be shared.
- **Help students understand the purpose of critiques.** Discuss with students that critiques do not have to come from a place of judgment but rather a place of wanting to help the creator improve the piece. Oh (2018) identifies the responsibilities of the artist, mediator, and viewer.
- **Model taking critiques.** Share a piece of your work with students and invite them to offer critiques that could help you improve the piece. You can model applying and not applying particular aspects of their critiques in front of them.
- **Encourage students to ask questions when they receive critiques.** This helps them have agency over their work. Oh (2018) writes, “you [the artist] have the ultimate control over how you make and understand your work.”
- **Have students reflect on critique received.** Students can share (in writing, video, etc.) their thoughts on the critique. This can provide them the opportunity to have agency and to articulate why they took particular feedback or not.



Read more about Bartel’s ideas regarding empathetic critique here.



Read more about Oh’s (2018) ideas here.