

One of the most important ways to grow as a creative professional is through peer feedback and critiques. Given this fact, the Portfolio Preparation course is designed to require such feedback on a weekly basis. Be sure to avail yourself of the opportunity to both give and receive meaningful criticism. It is part of your grade, of course, but it is also a great way to gain insight.

It is notoriously difficult to stand back and see what we are doing objectively—we always know in the back of our minds what it was we intended to draw, write or say, and we often perceive this, rather than what we have actually produced. This is when dispassionate, objective, constructive feedback becomes important, as it provides a needed reality check. Additionally, an outside observer can also often spot potentials, as well as problems, that we can be blind to in our own work.

So what does it mean to critique the work of a classmate or peer? What it does not mean is to just say “I really like that.”, or “That stinks.” This is just opinion, and as such it is useless for helping develop a body of work. A useful and effective critique involves:

- A deconstruction and analysis of at least part of the item under consideration. A 3D model, for instance, can be analyzed in terms of polygon efficiency and use of textures, with specific notation about the polys and textures used and how they are deployed.
- Commentary on what is successful about the item. In our example, perhaps the normal maps work very well to give a realistic effect.
- Commentary on what is not working so successfully. Perhaps the model uses more polys than it needs to, given the effective use of textures.
- Suggestions about how to address the issue in question. We might suggest that the model be recreated with fewer polys and the textures then reapplied, to make it more efficient.

As you can see, this is quite different from just saying “Your model does not seem to work very well.”, or something like that. Rather, we have provided actionable information and analysis, so that the owner of this model can work to improve it.

Finally, it is absolutely critical to present our critiques in language that is courteous, as well as constructive. No one wants to be flamed over their work, and such an approach will have the effect of causing your intended audience to discard your critique, rather than acting on it. Always consider how it would sound to you if your critique were aimed at your own work. Would you find it respectful? Useful?

Sometimes you might think, “These people are my competition, so why should I offer to help them?” For one thing, you will typically be working on a team and the concerns of the team must come before your own ambitions, for the success of your project. Finally, being a creative is a special privilege and all privilege comes with duty. It is your duty to help your peers to grow and prosper—that is the premise on which this course is founded.