

Class critique



Tom Sherrington and Sara Stafford

What's the idea?

Structured, whole-class feedback sessions where a group of students collectively critique a piece of work, offering suggestions and guidance to help its owner improve.

What does it mean?

In *An Ethic of Excellence* (2003), Ron Berger makes the case for accepting only the highest standards of 'excellence' in students' work. One way to do this, he suggests, is frequent and repeated re-drafting of work, supported by regular class critiques.

A class (or small group) examine a piece of work together before taking turns to offer kind, specific and helpful feedback that supports the owner of the work to improve on their next attempt. Although there are some challenges to Berger's work, this technique gives students formative input, and a chance to learn from their peers.

What are the implications for teachers?

You can explicitly teach Berger's three simple rules for effective class critique:

Be kind. Critique should be positively framed and honest, making the work the focus (not its owner). You can try using questions, for example, 'Could you try using a ruler to make the lines more precise?'

Be specific. Critique should 'zoom in' on individual elements and offer detailed suggestions for improvement. For example, 'Could you find a word to replace "big" that shows the character's power as well as his physical size?'

Be helpful. Critique is only useful if it improves the work. David Didau (2013) suggests students use the words 'so that' as this forces them to consider how their advice is helpful.

Students will require support to become skilled, independent critics of each other's work.

Build up from guided critique sessions (where you model the language and rules), to 'gallery' sessions (where students' work is displayed and they move around the room offering suggestions for improvement – post-it notes can be handy here).

The long-term goal is that students are able to critique the work of their peers without teacher input, but this will take time and patience. It's also crucial that students learn to self-correct and not become dependent on feedback, so consider this carefully too.

Top tips:

You could show this video of Berger explaining the power of critique to a primary school class to all students, whatever their age! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqh1MRWZjms>

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Berger R (2003) *An Ethic of Excellence*. Portsmouth NH, USA: Heinemann.
- » Didau D (2013) *Improving peer-feedback with public critique*. Available at: <https://learningspy.co.uk/assessment/improving-peer-feedback-with-public-critique/> (accessed 26 October 2018).
- » Tharby A (2014) *Adventures with gallery critique*. Available at: <https://reflectingenglish.wordpress.com/2014/03/27/adventures-with-gallery-critique/> (accessed 26 October 2018).