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Supporting inclusive and developmental crits

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Supporting inclusive and developmental crits: a guidance for staff at UAL

UAL is committed to *Critique* as a valuable and established process for learning within creative subjects.

> 'The Crit is a key site for the creation of value' [Orr and Shreeve, 2017, 40].

Crits, or Critiques, are opportunities for discussion and peer feedback on a student's work. They take place in different ways, varying in size and mode.

Crits provide space to develop critical thinking, presentation and feedback skills. The nature of a critique is analytical focus on creative outputs by others, and the wellbeing of those sharing work should also be considered to ensure a proactive and inclusive learning environment.

Critique is described as "one of the most valuable components of a formal art and design education. It is also one of the most difficult […] Critique is a collaborative activity that takes quite a bit of time to learn — both in terms of how to *give* feedback, and how to *accept* feedback" [How to Crit].

This staff guidance aims to support consistency in the delivery of inclusive and developmental crits.

'A' Principles
Agree ground rules: for respectful and constructive questioning and feedback. Collectively developing and agreeing ground rules can help foster a compassionate learning space where students feel safe to share and discuss. Establish an understanding of what a UAL crit looks like, which may look different for students with previous educational experience. [Ground rules can include seeking consent before touching work of others]. Ensure that regular breaks are offered to support student concentration.
Ask the individual: Personalising discussions by asking what an individual would find most helpful in terms of feedback helps ensure focused and constructive comments. This also recognises their agency in the space and help flatten the hierarchy.

'B' Principles

Balance feedback: Commenting on strengths alongside areas for development ensures individuals receiving feedback will have rounded comments to work with. Feedback may also come in the form of questions, to be framed respectfully.

Bring in all voices: Facilitators to ensure all voices are heard, maintaining time for all participants to engage. Recognising lived experience of students is also important.

Build up: It can take students time to build confidence in and understanding of the crit process. Provide scaffolding for students, in terms of how to present and give feedback, and support them to build up skills incrementally over time.

Be open to learning: Crits are a learning opportunity for students and facilitators. While students will likely expect tutors to provide feedback regardless of expertise level, tutors expressing a willingness to learn alongside students flattens hierarchy and opens dialogue.

'C' Principles

Critical thinking: Deconstruct and reflect on existing knowledge, show respect and encouragement for the expression of self through work shown. Champion multiple ways of knowing. Connecting discussions to Learning Outcomes and assessment criteria can help focus Crits, so they are productive and positive experiences. [Although Crits are formative in nature, they are unlikely to be a format for a final assessment].

Choice: Equality Act 2010 requires us to make anticipatory adjustments. Proactively offer students a choice of ways to participate in Crits. This might include the choice of presenting in groups, online or via video recording, or providing a text summary over verbal description. When feeding back, this might include allowing students to feedback in Post-its, in pairs or online.

Concept and cost: Acknowledging the impact of cost of living on students helps focus discussion on concept rather than material choice/production quality.

Capture feedback: Explore different ways feedback can be captured for students receiving comments on their work [e.g. written summary, audio recording], subject to consent of all involved. This relates to the earlier point of agreement of ground rules.

Celebrate: Despite the name, Crits offer a rare opportunity to collectively appreciate student work and student voice. Spend time acknowledging strengths of the work, its articulation and/or the debate.

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Acknowledgement

Resources

- Compassionate feedback: Ideas for prompting reflection on compassionate approaches to feedback, Academic Enhancement team.
- Disabled Students' Commission (2020) Three months to make a difference: key areas of challenge for disabled students requiring urgent action from institutions and policy makers in HE.
- legislation.gov.uk, Equality Act 2010.
- Goldstein, Mitch, How to Crit, (2023).
- Orr, Susan, & Shreeve, Alison (2017), *Art and design pedagogy in higher education: Knowledge, values and ambiguity in the creative curriculum* (London: Taylor and Francis).
- Q-ART CRITS (2008-2019).
- Sherwood, Calum, Crits and Inclusive Learning at UAL: An Arts SU discussion paper.
- Yilmaz, O. & Gelmez, K. (2023), 'How can I say this politely?': Remodelling peer critiquing in design education and revealing compassionate critiques, Journal of Art, Design & Communication in Higher Education, 22(2), pp. 277-296.
- Quick guides on managing conflict on the Student Services web pages, accessible by staff.