

# Developing Critical Analysis Skills with out Killing Creativity

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## The Assignment

### Targeted to

- Set specific technical and artistic goals.
- Make it open-ended enough to encourage a diversity of results.

### Beware of demonstration

- Students can get locked into what they saw you do.
- If you demonstrate use an example the students are unlikely to directly follow or forbid them to do the same thing you are demonstrating.
- For example sound design students are required to create a 30 second to 1 minute sound story. The most common story is getting up in the morning which is very easy to communicate with a few sounds, doesn't vary much between students, and isn't terribly interesting to listen too. So by using that scenario as my demonstration I can create a straightforward demo to get the students rolling and at the same time forbid them from doing that same story which forces significantly more diversity in story-lines from the students.

## The Peer Review

### Getting a peer review

- Provides students feedback to revise a project.
- Provides students feedback on what gets the most attention.
- Students learn how different people respond to their project.
- Students get a a response from someone who is seeing the work for the first time.

### Giving a peer review

- Develops critical analysis skills.
- Develops communication skills.
- Learns about other approaches to the same or similar issues.
- Enforces careful listening to other students works.
- Can be used as the foundation of a class discussion on what was learned from a project.
- Must be practiced.
- Helps develop an appreciation for good ideas rather than right and wrong ways to do things.
- The use of forms turns this into an assessment tool.

### Make it a regular thing

- Doing one peer review doesn't allow the students enough practice.
- Needs to be an integral part of each class as well as the 4 year curriculum.

## Reflect on the process

- After one or two responses have been done discuss with the students what elements have been most helpful.
- Make students e-mail a reflection and then copy and past a list together that you can send around to everyone in the class.

## 3. Introduction to Professional Standards

- The attached form on loudspeaker evaluation was developed from the Audio Engineering Society standards for subjective evaluation of loudspeakers. This introduces students to professional standards. And, by using standards, opens instructional resources in the application of the evaluation that you don't have to write.

## 4. Observations

### A Work Not a Student

- Discussion is about a work not a student.
- The atmosphere must always be one that encourages risk taking.

### Developmental Paths

- Students have different developmental paths. Some students technical skills blossom first and some students artistic skills blossom first. The environment that peer review takes place in must be supportive of those differences.

### Developing Their Art

- Students are still developing their understanding of the Art and thus may not give very good advice. Taking time to discuss what sort of feedback was helpful is essential.
- It is important that the instructor read the peer reviews.

### Class Personality

- Every class has its own personality. Make sure you present assignments and peer reviews in a manner sensitive to that personality.

### Excitement

- There must be an excitement about the work and about fellow students work. If critical analysis becomes a process for finding fault rather than helping and celebrating others work it should be stopped.

## Selected Student Feedback on Peer Reviews:

- “Peer reviews that were thorough on at least one point or another, even with repeating points between reviews, were extremely useful. However, many tried to cover all of the questions and I feel it would be better if there were either more time to complete the form or to make it clear that it would be acceptable to take more time on certain review sections that stuck out as important”

*This is extraordinarily important. Quality feed back on one point is far more important than answering every question. We know this as teachers, focusing our comments on what each paper needs. However, students have been trained to answer every question on the test. Peer review becomes one of the ways that we help students move beyond their educational conditioning. This is a point you will need to discuss and comeback to and it highlights the importance of having discussions about the peer review process.*

- “I felt that the peer reviews were extremely useful- when people put a lot of thought into them and actually wrote those thoughts out. They were really the best part of the project for me because I learned so much from them on ways to approach the project and how I could improve things. I was often surprised by people’s reactions and they helped me realize that everyone analyzes what they hear differently..... Sometimes very differently!”
- “In general I felt that peer review process was helpful...it allowed for others to give constructive feedback that may not have otherwise been shared, and I felt everyone was respectful even when being honest about the project’s deficiencies.”
- “The peer reviews were nice, but not as a great of a tool to kill so many trees. I think it’d be better if we just listened in class, then were forced to go back and listened to the projects again at a later time, then write a paragraph of focused text for each person’s project. This way we can all take a closer listen, and save the trees.”

*I am moving towards an online peer review system so that I can save trees. I’m currently working through a couple of issues with that transition. The first is rearranging out of class work expectations. That area of the class is all ready full. If we do the peer reviews in class it adds to the value of the presentations that were all ready required outside of class I have to think about possibly dropping readings or other assignments to make time for the peer reviews. The next problem is that every sound system is different and if students are listening on their own systems rather than the classroom system many of there comments will have to do more with their listening system than the other students work.*

- “Peer reviews really helped me in the respondent point of view because it gave me things to listen for”  
*This is one of the biggest things I’m going for and is the core reason I use detailed forms for the responses. In some ways I’m more interested in the work it takes for them to fill out the forms than the benefit to the respondent.*
- “The peer results were generally useful. I think they should be less questions or more direct questions. What tended to happen was that I was frantically filling out reviews in order to have time to fill out the next one. As a result, my feedback may have not been as good as it could be.”

*This can be a big issue. Presentations will take longer if people are writing about them and there needs to be time for that writing to happen. Some projects may need multiple listenings or viewings as well, which could really mess up your course schedule. However, the peer reviews can give you a good sense of how valuable those changes are in your class.*

- “The peer evals. helped especially w/ what they like and suggestions for making the work better - I didn’t like the format of the reviews because some of the sections didn’t really mean much/help w/making piece better.”
- “I think it would be extremely helpful if there was a reaction to piece, good points, and unclear/needs improvement sections on the reviews.”

*This would certainly simplify my forms and make them easier to complete and with some classes this is probably the way to go. Many of the forms I use have been developed from industry standards for subjective evaluation and they push students to develop the critical skill to differentiate problems and listen for specific things. In some cases by focusing you are also developing stronger skills at fixing.*

- “I actually enjoyed receiving peer reviews. It helps you get a broader look at your work as opposed to getting one persons point of view (professor). It also was a way to brainstorm ideas on what ways to make your project better.”

*Why are they so often surprised when they like something or find something useful?*

- “I found that the peer review sheets were helpful for improving projects. It helps to find out what they heard vs. what you hear. You thinking a sound is something can be way different than what they hear.”
- “I found the majority that took the time to write down their ideas clearly really helped me to take a step back and look at my work. Often I found myself getting very focused in on one spot and peer reviews allowed me to take a step back and analyze my work with a different mindset.”
- “My thoughts on the peer review process are minimal. I found that I disregarded most of them because the responses were always not descriptive enough. I felt that if there was more time to write I would have gotten more thoughtful responses. I really only looked at your notes.”

*You can't please all the people all the time. At least my notes were valuable.*

- “Peer reviews were generally helpful. All of the comments that I received were very constructive. Respondents brought up both things I could work on and things I did well. Having a variety of personalities in the class was great because the different respondents focused on different aspects of the work. I definitely read through all of them when I got home.”