

Steps for Critique: Translating the Visual into the Verbal

Critique uses language to describe, analyze, and interpret art. Begin by observing the piece with care and attention, respecting the work and the artist. Analyze what you are seeing, how the piece is composed, and each of the artist's choices. Determine context for the piece; then consider what the artist is saying. Hold your personal feelings and emotional response to the piece until the final evaluation.

Take a few minutes to review [Barrett's Principles of Interpretation](#).

1. DESCRIBE

Look with a naive gaze and list what you see. State the obvious. This step is completed without judgement.

- What type of work is it: painting, photograph, sculpture, etc.?
- What medium is the work in: carved marble, watercolor on panel, black and white giclée?
- What elements are included: figures, objects, shapes, colors, etc.?
- How are elements arranged?
- Is the work abstract, representational, or something else?
- What other characteristics of the work do you observe, such as scale, tools, process, etc.?

2. ANALYZE

Outline the formal aspects of the piece, how the elements are composed, and what choices the artist has made. Look at the piece through the lens of each compositional concept.

- Which compositional concepts are at play in the piece, and how?
- How do the characteristics described in the first step impact the viewer's perception?
- What is the subject or focal point?
- Why was a certain technique used, and why not another one?
- What artistic choices stand out, and what is their effect?

3. CONNECT

Look for symbols and references. Connections made are not to imply that the piece is unoriginal, but to place it in dialogue with other works and culture itself.

- What does the piece remind you of?
- What immediate connection does your mind make?
- Does the piece relate to other works of art?
- Are the elements, process, or artistic choices symbolic or allegorical?
- What broader context does this piece reside in: how does the piece relate to specific times, places, or cultures?

4. INTERPRET

Use your description, analysis, and connections to suggest possible meanings for the piece.

- What is the piece about?
- What feelings does the piece incite?
- What ideas are communicated by the piece?
- Is there a message, and if so, what is the message?
- What are the artist's intentions?

5. EVALUATE

After the above steps are complete, use what you have outlined to inform your opinion.

Describe your aesthetic response. Evaluations are subjective.

- Is it art?
- Is it relevant, what are its merits, where is there value?
- What are the weaknesses and strengths of the piece, and why?
- What rubric or criteria are used to make the evaluation?