

Why should you critique?

From Garrey Faller at <http://www.flickr.com/groups/545852@N23/discuss/72157602493016310/>

Why should you critique? It not only helps your fellow photographer, but it also helps you become a better one. With increasing experience you will notice an improvement in your own images over a short period of time.

First , there is critique etiquette. You simply need to have manners and common sense. **Don't be rude.**

What are some of the features that could be addressed in a critique? Basically, any variable that went into making an image can be addressed. Remember, the most important thing is to convey to the photographer whether you liked or disliked the image and give reason for this and suggestions for improvement. The following is a noninclusive list of some elements that can be commented upon:

1. Composition:

- a. Vertical vs. Horizontal: Would the image be improved if it were a vertical? horizontal?
- b. Rule of 1/3's: Did the photographer obey this rule? Should it be broken? How about the golden rule ?
- c. Is there a strong enough subject?
- d. Does the background distract. Would a shallower depth of field (dof) help the image?
- e. Leading lines: Did the photographer use leading lines? vanishing points?
- f. Horizon: Is it level?
- g. Is the image too busy? are there unnecessary distracting elements in the photo?
- h. Angle/vantage point: Did the photographer choose the right angle. Should he/she have gotten lower or higher. Could the vantage point be changed?
- i. Does the subject fill the frame? Is it close enough?
- j. Texture: is there nice texture in the image?
- k. Patterns: Did the photographer take advantage of patterns and textures?

2. Technical/Camera stuff:

- a. Is it in focus? is it sharp? Could you recommend some sharpening?
- b. Exposure. Is it properly exposed? Are either the shadows or highlights clipped? Is the sky blown? Could the photo benefit from HDR?
- c. Did the photographer choose the correct shutter speed and aperture? Could the photo benefit from a longer shutter speed (ie "fluffy water")
How is the depth of field. DOF.
- d. Is there too much noise? Perhaps recommend some anti-noise software. Did the photographer use a high ISO unnecessarily?
- e. Are there dust spots on the sensor?
- f. How is the lighting? Is it Flat? Could the image benefit from some fill flash? Could the portrait benefit from short lighting? loop lighting? reflector?
- g. Tripod: Would the image benefit from a tripod?
Does the image suffer from camera shake? If so recommend a proper grip.

- h. Filters : Would a polarizer or a neutral density filter improve the image?
- i. Lens choice: Did the photographer choose the best possible lens? Would a telephoto lens improve the shot by compressing it? Would a wide angle lens be a better choice to emphasize depth. How about a "faster" lens. Fisheye? You get my point.

3. Post processing:

- a. Do the colors look real? Are they oversaturated? Undersaturated? Color cast?
- b. Do you notice some bad processing? bad cloning? bad selection techniques?
- c. Black and white images: Is there enough contrast? Inquire about the method for conversion. Was it just desaturated? Is the color version better?
- d. Could you recommend some cloning?
- e. Color cast: is there a color cast? You should be familiar with this topic and how to remove it. Every image captured by a digital camera has a color cast according to Vincent Versace.
- f. Sharpness: Is it too soft? is it over sharpened (Do you see halos)
- g. Tonal range: Could the image use some levels or curves adjustment. How about HDR(high dynamic range)
- h. Contrast: is there enough contrast? Could you suggest shadow highlight filter? curves adjustment?
- i. Could you suggest a Photoshop tutorial on the web?
- j. Is the background too bright and distracting? Could suggest darkening the background.
- k. Are there any digital artifacts?

4. Impact:

What kind of impact does the image have on you? Does it illicit any emotions? Artistic qualities?

5. Commercial viability:

Could it be a good stock photo? Could it be used in advertising.

Is there ample space for text?

6. Other:

Perhaps you might want to make suggestions for printing. Suggest a certain type of paper. ? Mat vs luster etc.

Study the professional critiquers. Be positive. Start out your critique by mentioning something positive in the image. There are plenty of resources available on the web. Read as much as you can. So, as you can see, there is a lot that you can talk about. If you are a newbie, just jump in and pick one issue and critique away.

Guidelines that the person asking for the critique should follow

Let's not forget that there are a few guidelines that the person asking for the critique should follow.

First, it is helpful to create a unique title for your critique. Just saying "please critique" is redundant, not interesting, and may cause your image to get less critiques than others if the forum is inundated with posts.

Also, when asking for a critique, it is also helpful to ask specific question (s) such as: How is the composition? How is the lighting? Is it sharp enough?

Finally, it may be helpful to supply exif data (ie aperture, shutter speed, type of camera, lens, strobe info etc). Although flickr provides most of this in the exif data, it just saves time when you list these details in the thread. It shows that you prepared well and deserve other people's valuable time. It's too often that the photos do not have any metadata with them. Sometimes flickr doesn't show the metadata. Ratatosk explains.. "One of the reasons is if you save your photos in PS under the "Save for Web". This procedure strips an image of its metadata. Save As... should be the method used, but then you need to change the resolution of the image yourself and change the color profile to sRGB"

The following is a quote from Zack Arias (www.zarias.com) about his critique rules:

Person doing the critique :

1. Tell you what you are doing right without patronizing you.
2. Tell you what you need to work on without holding your hand.
3. Give you a goal.

Person asking for critique

1. Don't take it personally.
2. Don't make excuses.
3. Don't say, "Well, my client was happy with it." See number 2.