



Critique protocols are structured processes that guide students in giving and receiving high quality feedback. They can be written or verbal, silent or noisy, and with varying degrees of collaboration. Critique protocols are valuable tools for improving student learning of the content and improving the products they create at all stages of a project because the protocol you use can be tailored to focus on big picture ideas or product details.

WHY IS IT USEFUL?

Critique protocols are impactful in variety of ways—from improved student work to increased content understanding to greater independence. By giving students a chance to see each other’s work and compare it to their own, the standard for quality is normalized among students and the bar raised. Simultaneously, students are interacting with the project content in a way that requires critical thinking to evaluate the work and provide feedback. In doing this, students are empowered to improve their work and content understanding independent of any direct teacher feedback, resulting in better self-management skills. All the while, through facilitating peer critique, you are continuing to build a culture of collaboration and reinforce the class norms.



WHAT DO I DO?

There are many variations on critique protocols, and they generally fall into two categories, gallery or consultancy. Both types are structured processes and require planning.



In gallery style protocols, such as the **Gallery Walk**, the students’ work stands alone without verbal explanation. The owner of the work is not with their work and does not receive the feedback immediately. This allows the critics to be silently contemplative as well as anonymous if you choose.



Consultancy style protocols, like the **Tuning Protocol**, are verbal activities where students present their work and receive verbal feedback immediately. They are usually done in small groups where each student or team takes a turn presenting and receiving feedback.

The following steps are helpful in choosing the appropriate critique protocol and implementing it:

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
<p>1. Determine the protocol that best fits the students and the products to be critiqued.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilize peer critique at all stages of the project. At the beginning, focus on big picture ideas. As students' work products progress, narrow the focus to the details through specific prompts for students to consider. Critique protocols can be as simple or complex as you choose. When critique is first introduced to your students, use protocols with fewer steps and simple directions. Provide prompts to guide the students in their critique. Further support them with sentence starters so their feedback is as targeted as you want it. Protocols can be modified to fit your students and their work products. You can even ask them how they would like to modify a protocol to fit their needs. Consider how you will group students. Depending on your students and the work, pairs, trios, or larger groups might be appropriate. Technology can be utilized with digital gallery walks where students post their work in a specific online location and students provide feedback as "comments" to that post. In consultancy style protocols, tech tools can be leveraged in recording the verbal feedback.
<p>2. Set expectations for participation in the critique protocol.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is an opportunity to reinforce and utilize the norms the class has agreed upon. If the norms haven't been posted in the room, now is the time to get them up. You could use collaboration and communication rubrics to help set expectations. Be sure to choose one that is age appropriate and allows your students sufficient time to analyze it and pose any questions they might have. Ron Berger's "Story of Austin's Butterfly" video is an excellent introduction to critique for everyone—kindergarten to adult. Watch this with your students and discuss the norms that made peer critique successful. From there, choose your critique norms and come to consensus as a class. Simple norms, as seen the Austin's butterfly video, for providing high quality peer critique can be boiled down to the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be kind. Be helpful. Be specific. Though simple, these norms are not necessarily easy, so make sure to discuss examples and counterexamples for how to do each of these.
<p>3. Present the protocol to your students.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One way to present a protocol is through a fishbowl activity. In a fishbowl activity, the teacher facilitates as a small group of students runs through all the steps of the protocol, modeling the participation that is expected while the rest of the class observes. Fishbowls can be abbreviated time-wise since the intent is to model the process rather than dive deep into students' work. Another way to present a protocol is through a whole class critique of a work sample from the previous year. Using an old work sample allows students to be critical without worrying about the feelings of the work's owner. Providing feedback as a whole class also normalizes the depth and quality of feedback that is expected.

STEPS	INSIGHTS/SUGGESTIONS
4. Facilitate the protocol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless you have a deeply ingrained culture of critique and highly independent students, you should run the protocol by introducing each step, providing prompts when appropriate, and keeping time. • Keep the protocol steps accessible and visible to students, so they can follow along and refer to it when necessary. • Making a timer visible to students by projecting it on a screen helps students regulate their depth and speed when they share ideas. • Support student engagement by providing a graphic organizer for analyzing work, gathering thoughts, and receiving feedback. • For gallery walks where students' work stands alone with no verbal explanation from the owner, students can provide their feedback either on a blank sheet of paper sitting next to the students' work, on sticky notes, or—in the case of digital gallery walks—as typed comments. Remember to determine if feedback will be anonymous or not and adjust accordingly.
5. Debrief the protocol with your students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This debrief is more about how the process went rather than the specific feedback received. You are asking students to share how the protocol was or was not helpful, ways they would change the process for next time, and how participation could be improved. • Make sure the peer critique norms and collaboration rubrics are at the center of the discussion.
6. Review the feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students sift through and organize the feedback they received either individually or in teams. Upon digesting the feedback, students consider the changes they need to make in their work product and write down their next steps. • "Next Steps" can be part of any graphic organizer that was used during the critique protocol. • When submitting their next draft of this work product, have students highlight where their work has changed based on the feedback received. If students choose to ignore any feedback, require that they explain why it was not actionable.



Students don't provide helpful or high quality feedback.

When establishing critique norms and modeling feedback doesn't yield high quality feedback, you can attempt to improve it by holding students accountable to the quality of the feedback they provide through formal assessment. This means you will need to create a system for collecting the feedback that fits the protocol and flow of work in the project. For digital gallery walks, this might be as simple as checking comments made to a blog post. For non-digital gallery or consultancy protocols, this might be a graphic organizer or written log of feedback where students keep track of the feedback they provide. Just make sure to be clear with students about the criteria you're using in assessing the quality of their feedback. Co-creating with students a rubric on high quality feedback would help you in assessing, as well as the students in self-assessing.



Students feel like they need to accept all the feedback they've been given.

A way to help students be more open to receiving feedback is to let them know that they get to choose what to do with the feedback they receive. It is their (or their team's) project, and they get to make decisions. The process of giving and receiving feedback is meant to be supportive and generative. Because not all feedback will be high quality—some of it might not be relevant, or a suggestion might take the work in a direction different than intended—not all feedback is equally actionable. It is, however, important to encourage students to consider all the feedback they receive even if they choose not to follow it.