

Criticism

Criticism is a process used to describe, interpret, and evaluate works of art. It is informed by experiences in creating art (production), historical and cultural context (history), and criteria for evaluating a work (aesthetics). Criticism also is about questioning the choices made by artists in creating or interpreting a work.

Students should be encouraged to make informed judgments about the art they create and experience. Significant evaluations are more than generalized opinions (“I liked this. I did not like that.”). They include *whys* — reasonable explanations for opinions and value judgments. While objectivity in evaluating arts experiences is the goal, complete objectivity is impossible to attain.

Responses are influenced by the critic’s age, background, artistic experience, and natural predilections. Critical judgments about choices made by artists should be informed by aesthetic criteria derived from knowledge about the nature of art and the cultural and historical context of the work.

Criticism involves perception, description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of artwork. Critical inquiry focuses on questions about what is there (perception and description), what it means (analysis and interpretation), and its value (judgment). Criticism also involves comparing and contrasting works to one another and consideration of aesthetic criteria derived from social, cultural, and historical context.

One approach to criticism is to describe, analyze, and then evaluate:

- Describe the elements of the experience without interpretation or judgment (descriptive statements are basically statements of fact).
- Analyze how the elements were employed by the artists and to what effect. What did they do? How did they make you feel?

Consider:

- the artists’ presumed goals,
- other options the artists might have chosen, and
- related observations and evaluations by other critics.

Evaluate the work as a whole. The principles of German writer Johann Goethe (1749–1832) can be useful for evaluating works of art:

- What were the artists trying to do?
- How well was it done?
- Was it worth doing?