



Giving and Taking Criticism

The Importance of Constructive Criticism

Simply put, constructive criticism from other people helps us do a better job. Something you write may make perfect sense to you, but if your classmate does not understand it, it is useless. You may think your web page is easy to navigate, but if the user can't figure out which link to click to get the information he or she wants, then the web page fails. If you make your web page lime green because that is your favorite color, but other people find it distracting and hard to read, your entire project suffers. The only way to find out whether your text and web design really "work" for your audience is to ask them. You will probably be very surprised by what people tell you when you ask.

Giving Constructive Criticism

The key to constructive criticism is the first part – being *constructive*. If you read the text someone wrote and say "I don't get it", that does not help them very much. Try to let them know why you are confused. You might say something like "The third sentence in the paragraph seems to contradict the first sentence." Or, "I think the word "ecology" is misused in the second paragraph. "Environment" is probably a more accurate term". Always be specific about what you think could be improved and offer a suggestion if you have one.

Remember that you are critiquing *something*, not *someone*. Try to address your comments at the work and not at the authors. For example, don't say "Your choice of lime green for the background is distracting." Instead say "I find the lime green background distracting." This is much less personal. Of course, you should also avoid using inflammatory language. For example, don't use words like "horrible" or "stupid" in your comments. Always make pretend that you are the person receiving the criticism, and how you would feel reading it. These are some simple practices that will keep this challenging process very productive for everyone.

Taking Constructive Criticism

It is never easy to have people criticize something you've worked hard on no matter how constructive they are about it. But don't be defensive. Just simply try to revise your materials according to their suggestions, or maybe try some other alternatives. If you think that they were incorrect about something (e.g., The proper term *was* ecology, not environment.), you need to add some clarification, definition, or other information to support what you have written. It is always good practice to have the same people review your revisions to see if you have fixed the problems that they saw. You will probably go back and forth with reviews and revisions several times.