HOW TO PRODUCE EFFECTIVE CRITIQUES

**Due:** Weekly

**Worth:** 15% of your final grade

**Impact:** To help you become an effective critic of your own writing

*This class functions as a writing workshop. Every week you will critique the work of 4 of your fellow students. So, while your individual work will be critiqued every four weeks, you will be critiquing others’ work EVERY week, even the week your work is presented. Every week you will check the class Moodle site to read the writing, produce and bring written critiques to class the following week. It is your responsibility to read this new work and produce critiques.*

Critiques can be helpful for giving you a sense of how your work gets read (sometimes in ways you may not have predicted). It's good to proceed with honesty, curiosity, compassion, and a constructive approach. **Give your written critiques to the writers, but keep copies of ALL of your critiques of others’ writing because you are required to hand in four critiques twice during the semester for a total of eight critiques that will be evaluated. *If you are having difficulty writing critiques, please come and see me early on in the semester.***

* Read the writing thoroughly. Focus on the writing and try to articulate how you are making meaning from it.
* Think about ways to phrase your critiques constructively. You don’t have to give glowing reviews to everything: you can effectively comment on pieces that you think are extremely strong. Conversely, a negative critique should be backed with suggestions for improvement or specific detail about why it doesn’t work.
* It’s not enough to say “I like this” or “I don’t like this.” Give detailed reasons. Point to examples in the writing. Say why. Be specific. If there is a particular portion that strikes you favourably, feel free to mention that, but also tell the writer "how" something works. If you find yourself getting lost in a particular spot (is there a sudden and unexplained shift in point of view, for example?), identify that to the writer.
* Try to work with the purpose of the piece. It’s not enough to say, “I just don’t get it, so I can’t comment.” Try to determine what is giving you difficulty as a reader, as well as what’s working effectively.
* Art provokes reactions. If a piece of writing pushes such strong emotional buttons for you that you found it difficult to react fairly, be honest; let the author know.
* Never use the ideas of fellow students without their prior permission. Never reveal a colleague's work-in-progress to others outside the class without the author's permission. That goes for general discussions, too. So, as the saying goes, what's said in this class should stay in this class. Of course, if someone says something particularly useful/exciting, feel free to ask them if you can use/post it elsewhere.
* The critiques are not a dialogue between the writer and the critics. While it’s tempting to want to justify your work, especially in the face of potential criticism, it is better to use the critiques to improve your work, even it’s a bit of a struggle.
* Don’t write anything that you wouldn’t be comfortable telling the writer in-person.
* USE the critiques to improve your writing in the process of revision.
* In learning to critique other people's writing, you are also learning to become better writers. You will hopefully begin to notice your own writing habits and your strengths and weaknesses. This critical eye will enable you to become an independent writer and editor of your own work.
* When reading the critiques keep in mind that others are trying to help you improve your writing. What they say is not a criticism of you, your abilities, or your creativity. Sometimes, particularly if you feel close to a piece of writing, it may be hard to take criticism.
* Try to take all criticism as a way to improve the potential of your writing. You may find some people are better critics of your work than others, but take advantage of the fact that a wide range of people will be looking at your work and all these readings will likely provide you with incredibly useful information.
* We will be sticking to a very tight time frame, so it is crucial that you adhere to the deadlines posted in the syllabus, both for posting your own writing and bringing your written critiques to class.

This site also gives a helpful overview of the critique process:

http://howtocrit.com/

\*Guidelines for the critiquing process adapted from Rita Wong, Ashok Mathur, and Hiromi Goto.