



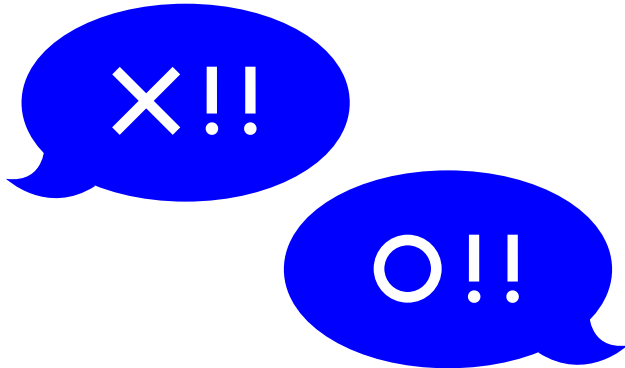
The Little Book
of
Design Critique
for Scientists

What Is Design Critique?

Design critiques are dedicated sessions in which participants gather to evaluate design ideas and identify future directions or changes. This feedback helps identify how modifying a visual might help it better meet its objectives.

Why Is This Important?

Design critiques help provide insights and perspectives a user might not be able to come up with on their own through targeted discourse. Practicing design critique helps a user build critical skills in identifying and proposing solutions to visual problems.



Critique Structure

Size

A good size for a critique group is around **3-7 people**. While more or less is fine, this range is considered to have the most active level of discussion.



Duration

Consider the amount of time that participants should be critiqued, as this will vary by project. When reviewing a small figure a minimum of 5 minutes per person may be sufficient, however, larger presentations may require up to 30 minutes per person.



Frequency

How often should a group meet to critique for a project or deliverable? At the minimum, **3 sessions** are considered a good goal—an early critique during the development of a visual, at the midway point, and at the end or before submission.



Critique Goals

Be sure to set personal and group goals for critique sessions. For example, if working on a series of figures for a publication, what should the group keep in mind when reviewing visuals? The audience? The journal requirements? In terms of personal goals, what might need to be changed to make a specific figure flow better, or show the meaning more clearly?

Before a critique begins, **participants should evaluate their own work**. Participants should come to the session prepared with the following information:



Name of the Design Being Reviewed



The Goal of the Design



The Target Audience



How the Visual Will Be Presented

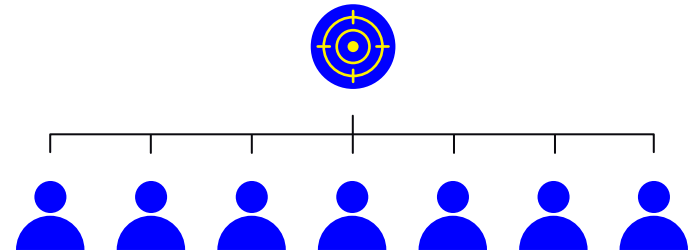


Constraints That Can't Be Changed

Before Critique

Before beginning a critique, have participants prepare all relevant materials and be ready to engage in discussion. A **critique leader** should be chosen to help direct conversations and keep them on track. In addition, participants should be given a consistent format for displaying their designs—for example, should they be printed? Or displayed digitally?

Participants should consider and record their critique goals before the session. They should be ready to discuss both the goals as well as their overall project background, in order to give more context to the work.



Critique Leaders Ensure Discussions Target the Goals of the Critique

During Critique

When getting feedback:

1. **Solicit feedback.**
2. **Actively seek constructive criticism—don't look for praise.**
3. **Consider and take note of all comments, even if you disagree with them.**
4. **Don't get defensive and say thank you.**
5. **Lean into discomfort.**

When giving feedback:

1. **Be respectful.**
2. **Discuss all relevant problems and don't be afraid to repeat a comment—this reaffirms that there is a noticeable issue.**
3. **Adopt a continuous learning mindset—know that the quality of a critiquer's comments will improve with practice.**
4. **Tailor feedback to meet the goals of the person being critiqued.**
5. **Don't sugarcoat constructive comments.**

After Critique

After a critique concludes, make sure that everyone knows about and is able to attend the next critique. Encourage participants to consider and implement the feedback they received by updating their visuals for the next session. It should be noted that **participants don't need to make every correction mentioned** but should consider all perspectives.

Discuss the successes and shortcomings of the concluded critique session in order to determine what could be improved or changed for next time. Have the critique leader record and take note of these comments for the group to consider.

Following a series of critiques, a figure should appear easier to understand and more refined than its initial version.





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Researcher's Toolkit for Visual Design and Critique

While learning visual design principles is helpful for understanding the essential basics of design, critique helps participants advance their understanding and utilization of these principles. Critique is arguably the most powerful tool for improving visual designs, as it provides the opportunity to receive and practice giving critical visual feedback.

Use this booklet to help initiate and get the most use out of design critiques.