

# IDEAS 56

**International Online Teachers Society  
Debate  
Educational Materials For  
Advance and Upper Intermediate  
Students**



**International Online Teachers Society  
Publishing Committee**



## CONTENTS

### THE 56<sup>th</sup> INTERNATIONAL ONLINE TEACHERS SOCIETY ESSAY CONTEST

CRITICISM | LITERARY CRITICISM | Azhar Hussain | 2

CRITICISM | YES, YOU'RE WRONG! | Kathlyn Q. Barrozo | 3

CRITICISM | CRITICIZING THE CRITIC—ENTERTAINMENT PLUS | Kathlyn Q. Barrozo | 4

CRITICISM | DEALING WITH CRITICISMS | Kathlyn Q. Barrozo | 5

CRITICISM | CANDLE IN THE WIND | Kathlyn Q. Barrozo | 6

CRITICISM | A GOOD CRITIQUE | Marian Baltazar | 7

CRITICISM | CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM - UNEMOTIONAL RESPONSE | Marian Baltazar | 8



## Literary Criticism

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### Importance:

Criticism is essential part of one's life if he want to foster his writing and know what other people say about his work. Samuel Johnson said, "I would rather be attacked than unnoticed. For the worst thing you can do to an author is to be silent as to his works."

If an author is unnoticed it means no-one likes to read and people dislikes his writings so much that no-one want to even comment on it. Criticism is like breaths of a person if it is bad you need to consult someone. In the same manner if people are criticizing an author he can consult other writers or teachers to correct himself. But, if he is not in the minds of anyone people are not interested in him at all.

Criticizing a person is also a bless. Writer knows that people want to correct me and they are telling me my mistakes which he can correct. Also, when people criticize more people know about that person too. The next time when writer improves his writing is welcomed by more audience then he can approach by his marketing or PR.

If a person is unnoticed and there is no comment about his writing or writing style people won't believe on his marketing campaigns too. They will think he's not a genuine person as if he was a real author at least anyone has said something about him. If people have not praised him they have criticized. So, praising or criticizing both are essential part of an author's life. One keeps him motivated and the other helps him correct his mistakes.

Also, there are trends of society and if an author is not correctly portraying the current trends his writing needed to be corrected by critics. People should be aware of what is correct description of situations and what is wrong. To know the right or wrong in writings literature need a literary critic. This literary critic is VVIP of literature and he's also treated as VVIP Very very important personality.

### Birth of Literary Criticism:

Literary criticism is believed to be as old as literature itself. When people had started reading they had also started liking or disliking of it that writing. People believed that literature is what we can live within it. Roman empire lost thousands of years ago but in its literature they are still alive, doing their routines, rituals and love.

### Conclusion:

Literary Criticism is as essential as literature itself. It gives literature a direction that is right for both writers and his readers.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What is literary criticism?
2. How do you differentiate criticism from a praise?
3. How do you criticize a literary work?
4. How can criticism be a motivation?
5. Why do you think criticism is essential in an individual's life?



YES, YOU'RE WRONG!

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I honestly believe that criticism is a two-way street: its sense and sensibility lie in the way one gives it and how one takes it. No matter how noble a person's intention is in giving criticism, that is easily marred by the manner with which the criticism is disposed. In the same vein, no matter how wise and truly constructive criticism is, if the criticized takes it as a direct insult or a hurtful derogative, the noble intention is readily defeated.

Imagine, if you will, a parent who wants to correct a child's mistake on his homework. When the parent chooses to employ hurtful and insulting words to drive home a point, the child ceases to see the correction as being a generous helping of wisdom. He begins to see that having the parent help him with his schoolwork can result to a break in their relationship because the parent fails to see the work that the child puts into everything. Contrast that with a loving way by which a parent delivers criticism. Helpful words like, "Let's work on this together and see if we can come up with a better answer" or "I know the answer is right there, we just need to find it together" can spell the difference between an expletive and a motivational word. Children respond well to encouragement, and as parents, it is our inherent obligation to respond to their needs positively, nurturing their talents and helping them let go of their negativities in the process.

It can be difficult to temper down criticism when a snappy answer can simply serve to put an end to every argument. But remember how it had once been said that words are like stones that you can never take back once they're hurled. Words hurt a lot more than cuts from a knife, and in more ways than one. Haven't we been advised to "put a guard" over our mouths? That doesn't merely refer to watching what and who you talk about but also watching what comes out: a nasty word, a biting remark, or a painful criticism. Having to bite one's tongue can be painful or even risky, but parting with a negative word is even much riskier.

As we go about our lives in our own careers and families, let us try not to be too critical nor overly accepting. Of course, condescension can also be a double-edged knife: you can either be arrogant or humble, depending on how you cut it. Keeping hold of your horses when something is patently incorrect can be very difficult. But wise people know how to play everything in a positive light. They always know how to deliver criticism without appearing to be doing so.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Do you find it easy or difficult to deliver criticism? Why?
2. What are the consequences of destructive criticism? Explain each consequence, if needed.
3. Why do people avoid individuals who are hypercritical?
4. What are your personal opinions on people who are considered perfectionists?
5. Have you ever been criticized harshly? Talk about the details of that incident in class.



## CRITICIZING THE CRITIC—ENTERTAINMENT PLUS

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Before attempting to watch a movie or read a book, I prefer to get my fill of critical reviews of those opuses first. I tend to believe that those who have seen a movie or read a book before me have a heavier authority to judge that work as superior or inferior. Unfortunately, mixed reviews abound, and one can be hard put to figure out which is genuinely helpful and which isn't. And then there's the star system, where a five-star rating (or three, depending on the rating agency's standards) means the work is excellent and anything lower diminishes its quality. I dread ratings that are a cross between poor and above average (read: average). They make you choose between having to experience the work yourself and suffering through the consequences of going through boredom and downright disgust, or the satisfaction of knowing you picked right.

I use ratings as guides, often. But if much hype has been built around the specific movie or book, I strive to find a way to experience it myself. Some say that later on in life, we always regret more the things we didn't do than the things we did. The what ifs tend to set us back more notches than the why dids, so many of us push everything to the edge. When the condemnations come, such people have a simplistic and non-complex justification of everything: you never learn your lessons first because they always come later.

This reminds me of a very young star's really trying and difficult experience last year. The star has disappeared from the entertainment scene after that much-talked about occurrence, all the better to recuperate from all the pain and bitterness it has caused. The star acknowledged the mistakes made, but refused to admit that those mistakes were half as serious as the other person's as it had been that young star's. Well, perhaps the young star was just trying to salvage whatever could be salvaged. Who knows, with the way this country's citizens easily forget even earth-shaking events, the young star's travails could very well be forgotten (and forgiven) in a few years or so.

Critics from both sides have most likely not forgotten (and forgiven) everything and everybody yet. And who can blame them? They might have heaped praise on one side while spouting vitriol on the other. That's a natural phenomenon in such situations. The spectators among us can only look and listen and do no more. Adding our own criticism can only muddle up the situation and create unrest. It'd be as senseless and stupid as poking a hornet's nest. You never get anything good from that.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Talk about a certain entertainment industry occurrence that has been heavily criticized in your country.
2. Is there any showbiz personality you admire for living an exemplary life, without cause for criticism? Talk about this star.
3. Why is it often helpful to read critical reviews?
4. Pick a movie to watch. Deliver a sensible critique of the movie in class.
5. What makes you choose to watch a movie or read a book? Is it easy to tell the difference between a good and a lousy movie or book? How do you personally tell the difference?



## DEALING WITH CRITICISMS

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People tend to think of criticisms that are thrown their way as a direct affront to their ability. However, there are still well-meaning people out there who are willing to dish out truly constructive criticisms in order to help others become better. It can often be very difficult to tell the difference, but the important thing is for people involved to be as open-minded as they can be, both in receiving and accepting criticisms.

Some get insulted too easily just because they have been doing the same thing for a very long time. Such individuals already have a fixed mindset that really proves hard to bend, let alone change. They also tend to have really sensitive egos that get hurt at the slightest poke. Although it is better to just let them go scot free with their minor mistakes, major errors cannot be so easily tolerated. It would be best for one with higher authority to handle the task of making such people know where they stand in the scheme of things rather than risk a huge snafu. Highlighting their achievements is a great way to make them feel they matter to the team, and helping turn their negatives into positives will show them how they can still contribute to future team endeavors and successes.

When we criticize, let us consider our purpose for doing so. Is the purpose noble enough or do we just criticize to make the other person feel bad? Criticize for the better, and not to simply put someone else down.

Of course, heaping too many praises and compliments, especially insincere ones, on people is never helpful. It might inspire someone at the onset but can lead to arrogance eventually. Achieving a balance is the key: highlight the genuinely good points but temper them down with a bit of healthy criticism. And make sure your words don't bite too hard. Nobody likes hypercritical people, especially those who cut too deep with their comments.

I, for one, would rather hear a sincere, constructive remark or comment rather than a dozen insincere compliments. However, hearing too many negatives tends to be off-putting for me. In such cases, I take the time to step back, restudy my options, change what I can, and proceed with what I do best. That way, I avoid too many setbacks and delays that could completely derail me. I tend to overthink things, some people say. I guess this stems from the fact that I try to be careful with what I do, too often. I've been advised to take things easy many times. I believe if I am finally able to do that, I will be able to achieve more. Well, there's still hope that I can become a better person, after all.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Why are criticisms often difficult to accept?
2. Do you think you'll make a great judge in a contest? Why or why not?
3. What kind of criticisms turn you off or hurt you immensely? Why?
4. How do you deal with criticism?
5. Can you tell the difference between constructive and destructive criticism? How?



## CANDLE IN THE WIND

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Have you ever been asked to critique someone else's work? Once, a very good friend asked me to do just that. She had already accomplished so much and gotten published in poetry, and I mean serious, English literary poetry, not the sort that young people spout nowadays with great enjoyment—you know, that senseless streetwise "flip top". Knowing how extremely talented she was, I hesitated. I gave her my reasons: I was younger than her, inexperienced at genuine literature. What right did I have critiquing her work? I even jokingly told her that she was most likely just humoring the both of us.

However, that good friend prevailed upon me to read her work and just write my thoughts about the whole thing. This I did, and promptly gave her two notebook pages of comments the next day. "Please don't laugh at my comments", I said. After she'd gone through my comments, my friend asked me if I had ever considered writing as a career option. I told her I had been editor of the literary section of our high school paper, had written a few poems and essays here and there, but have never seriously thought of pursuing writing seriously. Now, many years after that supposedly eye-opening conversation, I have lost touch with that good friend. I sometimes wonder where she is and how she is now. She lives in a village that I've visited only once in my life, and that single visit was made with her accompanying me in a hired three-wheeled vehicle. She, however, has been to where I live about a dozen times.

Many times, some people affect us in the most profound ways. They make us see the good in ourselves while managing to make it appear that we are doing them a favor. They give so much and ask for nothing I return. They make us look at ourselves deep inside and consider deeply what we can do better. Such a person was my good friend from way back. An artist through and through, writing was her passion. I have kept the photocopy of one of her published works about her native province, which she had given me herself. She was a great English grammar teacher, too, always knowing what was wrong with a sentence and explaining in detail about such things as syntax and what nots. I, for one, still have to go through each and every word in a completed work before finally being able to say fin.

However, I wish I could be able to talk to my friend and show her how she has influenced me in so many ways. The manner by which she did it might have been unassuming, but the effects were profound. I have yet to hold a candle to her name, but I sure as hell am trying to get there.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. Talk about a person you trust to be sincere in his/her comments about you. Why do you like this particular person?
2. When someone you're not personally close to criticizes you, how do you deal with that?
3. Why does criticism often hurt? When does it not?
4. What's the easiest way to deal with criticism, in your opinion?
5. Do you like how people use social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to rant and rave about things? Why or why not?



## A GOOD CRITIQUE

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A good critique is trying to be a helping hand to the writer for the improvement of one's skills. It is also to examine one's work and trying to evaluate it and create some feedback. This only means that a good critique is reviewing an individual's work so as to come up with factors and ways as to how to be an effective writer too. A thorough understanding of what the writer is up to is what a good critique is all about. Apparently, these means that writers are eager to gain an objective feedback, helpful hints and wide-flung research resources and that they are committing to help each other climb the rickety ladder to publishing success.

While new writers are joining workshops too, they are often more concerned with their ability to provide a good critique. More often than not, good critiquing skills come from experience but how could you get hold of it when in fact you lack the experience on how to learn the fine art of the critique? Maybe you can be guided by these following steps or few pointers that we could talk about. There will always be that time when you would want to criticize or even not criticize at all. So, whether you are new or not in critiquing, I think it would be better if we always try to be positive. So as not to offend the author we should correct or give corrections in a positive manner.

This holds true even if we want to point out something with the author, we should always do it in a positive way. The best way to do this is to relate it to ourselves, that is, if ever that thing happens to us too, of course we wouldn't want such comments to be given to our work, right? Then we should try to give a constructive feedback, like checking the sentence structure, if it is too wordy and repetitive. Not only that you have to trust your instincts too. It only means that you don't have to be a University graduate to critique well. Even a basic understanding of grammar and punctuation will help you get started.

Definitely authors who post their work for critique would want an objective feedback. A good critique wouldn't have second thoughts in asking about their work. One more thing that is proven advantageous to the author is by means of accepting critiques of their own work. In so doing, authors gain valuable insight and experience. Moreover, by critiquing the work of others, authors are able to hone their writing skills and at no monetary cost at all.

Apparently, it only shows that critiquing proves to be a reciprocal tool for authors. Authors submit their work for critique and in return critiques are required to offer their critiques as well. Over-all we could say that a good critique benefits both the writer and the critique.

Questions for discussion:

1. How could one be a good critique?
2. Do you get to criticize others work too? How do you do it?
3. Do you agree that in order to criticize the work of others, one must be a good critique?
4. What is a good critique for you? Explain your answer.
5. Does a good critique need to be optimistic? Why or why not?





## CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM - UNEMOTIONAL RESPONSE

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Constructive criticism is an unemotional response to people's actions and can prove to be very helpful and beneficial to an individual. If we do not let our emotions rule the way we criticize or judge a person, then we actually adapt constructive criticism. Although constructive criticism can be very helpful to a person, not all people are receptive to it. They sometimes feel that self-esteem goes down the drain and that their egos are being touched or harmed by it. This shouldn't be the case when we deal with such an unfavorable judgment.

Oftentimes, constructive criticism refers to the critique of someone else's written or artistic work, but in fact it means a critical reasoned analysis of a person's behavior. In reality, it has a goal of improving some area of another person's life or work. Most of the time people find criticism to be negative and this destroys the true intent of constructive criticism. As a matter of fact, constructive criticism should address the area in which a person needs improvement. It should be a reasoned, unemotional response in an effort to teach. Take for instance a child, who just lost a game, it would definitely be better if we could give him some encouraging words rather than making a critique out of his performance.

We can always criticize some person's work but we have got to be doubly sure that the said individual would not be offended with such action of ours. While we try to notice whatever mistakes that lie behind one's work, it should pave the way to drive that person to do better next time and not really be discouraged at all. That would only hold true if we criticize constructively and not let our emotions meddle in the way we give our observations and comments on a particular work or some area in an individual's personal life. As much as possible we should avoid direct criticism but try to be objective in the utmost manner. That is trying not to pinpoint defects or mistakes in an outright manner dealing with the individual personally.

In a teacher/student relationship, it would be of great help if the teacher will have a constructive criticism rather than criticizing the student bluntly of his defects. The teacher can either praise him in some areas or maybe write a question on the child's work so as not to be greatly affected and disappointed. What some teachers do is they provide guidelines beforehand to their students in writing an essay or a paper in order to eliminate further problems that may likely occur. I therefore conclude that constructive criticism actually means showing grace and giving the other party all the considerations for that person to continue doing his work in an efficient way and be at his best when the right time comes. As for me, we should always make it a point to be kind and helpful and extend whatever generosity we could give to make that person bring out the best in him and make this world a better place to live in. In general, constructive criticism wouldn't hurt us but give us a finer way of helping a person improve in some areas of one's life or line of work, so why don't we give it a try?

Questions for discussion:

1. What is constructive criticism?
2. Do you agree that constructive criticism is an unemotional response? Explain your answer.
3. Will the self-esteem or ego of a person be greatly affected when you adapt constructive criticism? Why or why not?
4. Have you practiced constructive criticism? How?
5. How do you criticize a person's work? Explain your answer.



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