

Ron Berger In-Depth Critique Protocol

“Students will say that this piece of writing is good because Suzy is a good writer. Teachers need to help students name what is good about Suzy’s writing, because once we name it, then we can use it.”

- Ron Berger

Purpose: The purpose of the critique is to teach particular skills to students. It is not for the whole class to give one student feedback on their work.

Critique rules:

- Be kind
- Be specific
- Be helpful

The protocol:

1. The lesson: The teacher needs to think about what lesson he/she is trying to teach his/her students. After looking at a draft of student work, what is the big idea that students are missing? What is troubling about the work? What’s the next step that many of the students are ready to take? It is helpful if the teacher has a list of 3-6 skills that the teacher wants the students to get better at.
2. Selecting the work: It is most important to find examples of student work that are great examples of what the teacher is looking for from the students, or else great examples of exactly not what the teacher is looking for. Looking at merely mediocre work will not lead to helpful discussion.
3. The critique:
 - a. Students are given one or two pieces of student work for in-depth critique. Examples include excerpts from student writing, architectural blueprints, solutions to math problems, lab write-ups, etc.
 - b. Students are given time to look silently at the work and think about what makes the work beautiful or where does it fall short.
 - c. Depending on age level, students could be given time to discuss this in small groups.
 - d. The teacher now leads a group conversation about the work. The goal of the conversation is to identify the attributes of great student work for this particular assignment. Once those attributes are *identified*, they need to be *named* in simple kid language so that they can be *used* by kids. The teacher works to lead students to the 3-6 skills identified in advance, keeping in mind that students may think of other useful skills that can be named.
4. Next draft: Students now create a new draft of this assignment, incorporating the skills identified during the critique session. It is helpful if students know in advance that a particular assignment is going to be completed in (say) three drafts. It is helpful if each draft is somewhat different from the one that came before it to avoid student burnout on a particular draft. For example, students could graduate to making an architectural drawing on a nicer type of paper with each succeeding draft. Or the first draft could be a rough sketch of a storyboard. The next draft could be a detailed sketch of the storyboard. The next draft could be a professional quality storyboard using materials used by professionals in the field.

Notes:

- If using an example of bad work, it is important to use work done by a student who your students don’t know.