

**timeinspace**  
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## CRITIQUES

*Tact is the ability to make a point without making an enemy.*

During projects, designers need a way to understand and explore the current direction of the design. The challenge is to create the openness needed for good ideas to surface, while simultaneously cultivating the feedback and criticism necessary to resolve open issues. Unlike brainstorming, where the exclusive goal is to come up with new ideas, a critique is focused on evaluating a set of existing ideas, and possibly identify future directions or changes.

### The Rules of Order for good critiques

#### START WITH CLARIFYING QUESTIONS.

Clarify any assumptions about what the presented design is intended to do, or what kind of experience it is intended to create. Hopefully, this intent is derived from the overall project goals, which is already agreed upon.

#### LISTEN BEFORE SPEAKING.

Many times we confuse conversations, which should be exchanges of ideas, with opportunities to inflict our opinions on others. If you take a moment to listen and understand before voicing an opinion, you're open to hear something new that might challenge your old thinking. Don't just wait for other people to finish, actively try to understand what's being said, and reflect it back to the speaker.

#### LEAD INTO EXPLORATIONS OF ALTERNATIVES.

Ask questions that lead to other choices the designer might not have recognized. Postpone judgments, unless there are obvious gaps between the designers intent, and the designs you are critiquing. If it fits with the goals of the critique, point out situations, sequences, or elements within the design that may be problematic.

#### AVOID STATEMENTS THAT REFER TO ABSOLUTES.

Instead, make points referent to the goals of the design. Example:

- #1      *bad:* "This sucks and it's ugly."  
          *good:* "Well, if the goal is to make this feel friendly, black and flaming red doesn't convey that to me."
- #2      *bad:* " How could anyone figure that out?"  
          *good:* "I think there's something missing between step 3 and 4. It's not clear to me what the sequence of operations is. How do you expect people to know where to click?"

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### WORDS AND PHRASES...

TO AVOID	Pronouns (he, she) I like/feel... I would have... Subjective adjectives (good, pretty, cool, etc.) Imprecise terminology (thingamajig, do-hickey, etc.)
ALTERNATIVES	The work... I observe... An [insert remedy] would make it even more effective Objective adjectives (effective, working, etc) Exact terminology (serif, tension, unity, etc)