

## critique

**cri-tique** (*kri-têk*<sup>1</sup>) *noun*

1. A critical review or commentary, especially one dealing with works of art or literature.
2. A critical discussion of a specified topic.
3. The art of criticism.

*verb, transitive*

**cri-tiqued, cri-tiqu-ing, cri-tiques**

*Usage Problem.*

To review or discuss critically.

[French, from Greek *kritikê tekhnê*, art of criticism, from feminine of *kritikos*, critical. See [critic](#).]

**Usage Note:** *Critique* has been used as a verb meaning “to review or discuss critically” since the 18th century, but lately this usage has gained much wider currency, in part because the verb *criticize*, once neutral between praise and censure, is now mainly used in a negative sense. (One is not likely to say, for example, *She criticized the bill approvingly*.) But this use of *critique* is still regarded by many as pretentious jargon; 69 percent of the Usage Panel rejects the sentence *As mock inquisitors grill him, top aides take notes and critique the answers with the President afterward*. There is no exact synonym, but in most contexts one can usually substitute *go over*, *review*, or *analyze*.<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt from the dictionary explains why we should call our sessions where we provide feedback on turned work “critique”.

How to give a critique?

I have distilled a few useful pointers from various people, mostly from the rec.crafts.woodturning newsgroup.

**"Lawrence Payne" <[payne\\_lawre...@yahoo.com](mailto:payne_lawre...@yahoo.com)> wrote:**

"Respect is the most important part of the literary community. Without it, there can be no discussion, learning, or growth. But, at the same time, you also have to be honest with both the artist and yourself. Even if they are the same person."

These are the words of a well-known (around here anyways) and well-respected English professor at my old university. The first time I saw them was 10 years ago in her English Literature class. They were painted on the wall of her classroom. Before she checked enrollment, took attendance, or even told us her name, she pointed to the words and said, "Whether you are in this class or not, know this." She then said the words out loud. "That statement is the foundation for all art appreciation."

The context of the above is literature, but I think it applies equally to our turnings.

Members bring items to show and to get feedback. Our spouses say: “That’s nice, dear. Can you make one for Aunty May?”, but to grow and improve we need more feedback.

The scoring sheets we use are more to prompt the reviewer than to provide any absolute score. Every critique is to some degree subjective – we are human after all, and have our likes and dislikes.

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**"Dan Bollinger" <danbollinger...@insightbb.com> wrote:**

A good and useful critique will be clarity of vision and offering suggestions for a new direction even if the criticizer doesn't particularly like it. A good critiquer will set aside their likes and dislikes, as much as is humanly possible, for the benefit of the artist. It happens every day in art and design schools around the world.

When I critique, say, to a class of college juniors, I know exactly where they should be design-wise by the end of the semester. If I gave the same critique to a high school freshman it would be too much, overwhelming.

The same critique to a college senior would be namby-pamby, or even sound atta-boyish. So, an appropriate question would be:

What level of turning expertise are you: Beginner, novice, accomplished, advanced, or expert?

Another comment is that it is important NOT to see an unfavourable critique as a criticism and feel a sense of failure. It is only natural, after putting in many hours into a piece, to feel some attachment, in fact if you didn't, it would be strange. However there is always risk in making something. Even if the piece is technically successful, it is very difficult to visualise the end product from the misshapen lump of wood that you start with. Only once the piece is finished, can you see what you have, and know whether it turned out the way you imagined. Even if it does, it may still not be "*right*" for a variety of reasons. Some of these you will see yourself, but sometimes critique can help you see possibilities.

**Victor Radin <vradin...@ameritech.net> wrote:**

Form then function or Function then form. This colours the balance of any criticism I may have for the piece as a whole. Art? Craft? Both? Other? Functional Bowl? Fanciful vase?

Perhaps I'm prejudiced, but a bowl has certain characteristics of "BOWL", that may or may not include holes, zippers, or other ornamentations.

Does it have pleasing proportions, height/width/transitions? Do the walls have thickness enough to support the perceived weight- again: proportion of size?

Do the lines "flow"? Does the grain pattern work with the physical form? Do the transitions compliment the grain and enhance the natural beauty or the wood?

Does the material fit the form or function? A goblet of pitch pine may look nice, have balance, excellent lines, but may not be particularly functional. On the other hand, that straight, no-figure, white-as-rice, lampshade is perfectly functional but has nothing to distinguish it from a store-bought fabric shade. Balance of form - function, art, craft?

Another, broader perspective is given by Darrel Feltmate:

Somewhere along the line we are faced with the question of what is art, specifically if it is to be addressed in the field of wood turning. For some such as myself, it is a moot point, as I do not picture myself as an artist, rather as a technician, striving to perfect technique. That said, it is to the artists that the technician turns for new areas to address those techniques. The old "a man's reach must exceed his grasp, else what's a heaven for?" drives us to better and better and technique and thus enjoyment of the task. Many of us seek a different challenge than turning the next thousand pens better than the last.

As we question what is art with respect to wood turning, we come to a fourth facet of the field, one to which you have alluded, namely the wood turning art critic. Peers tend to suggest almost universally that "the bottom needs to curve in more" as the harsh criticism along with "hey, nice piece." We need to address questions of form in relation to purpose, curves as directions to a resolution, interplay of light on surfaces, enhancements to surface and texture, resolution of idea, thought and intent as expressed in a finished piece, among others. How does the beauty of the medium draw us in ways that another medium might or might not. Would the piece be better resolved in metal, glass, ceramic or some other material?

Critics and criticism thoughtfully and wisely applied can determine much of the direction of artistic development not only of a person but also of a medium. We must also remember that if

turned wood is to be an art form, we need to be open to the criticism of our peers and the group is naturally expanded. No longer is the peer group only wood turners or for that matter collectors and sellers; it is a collection of potters, ceramicists, painters, fabric designers, sculptors and other artists. Most of them will take it for granted that the technique must be of a high standard. Their question will be, "does the result of the technique say anything?"

The debate on art vs craft is one for another day. There seems to be consensus that you need to be technically proficient in what you do – your craft, before you can progress towards art. This is underlined by the attention paid to the details of the piece in our critiques.

I would like to suggest a few more items to consider when looking at a piece:

- The scale of the piece – how does the piece work in the size that it is made in?
- Are the thickness and features right for the scale chosen?
- How does the material work in the scale chosen? (A coarse grained wood may not be appropriate for a small, delicate piece with fine features.)
- When the piece is handled, what tactile sensations are provided? Is it surprisingly light or heavy? Does it feel balanced? Are the textures of the surfaces right and consistent?
- Olfactory – can you smell the wood or the finish and is it pleasant?

I hope that above has given you some food for thought?

## Wits Woodworking Association - Woodturning Evaluation Sheet

At meetings of the woodturning section, members bring turned items that they have made for critique. The scoring sheet that we have used to date to provide some structure to the feedback has been around for some time, and it was felt that it needed updating. This is the updated one. It includes an explanation of the fields on the form, to help prompt the reviewers.

The main change is different scoring for beginners, intermediate and advanced levels. Your feedback on this sheet is welcome.

### **Points to consider for evaluation and critique:**

For beginners, more emphasis is placed on craftsmanship and less on design. For advanced turners, the impact and design is more important, hence the different scoring.

- **Craftsmanship:** Are there smooth curves and sharp transitions when required? Is the means of work-holding not obvious? Look at the fit of lid, at seams, gaps, and finishing off of base.
- **Degree of difficulty:** How much skill was required? What risks were taken to achieve the required design?
- **Quality of finish:** There should be no unintentional tool marks and sanding scratches, and no tear-out. The finish should be uniform where required and have the appropriate level of gloss?
- **Impact:** Consider the impact, both overall and in detail. Feel the weight and feel of piece, the balance, any tactile sensations, the surfaces, and any scents. Look at the embellishment – colouring, texturing and off-lathe work such as carving – does it add to the piece?
- **Design:** Are the proportions and scale right? Do the shape and transitions work? Consider form and function if it is a functional piece. Is the selection of wood appropriate for the piece? Is wood even the right medium?
- **Critique.** Give your reactions to the piece. Is it unique? What is clever about it and what works and doesn't. Is it saleable and to whom? Suggestions on how it may be improved?

Remember that this whole process is subjective. Respect the work of the turner and that they have submitted the work for critique to learn from it. Others will react differently to aspects of the work and your opinion is just one view. Frame your feedback diplomatically and balance the positive and the negative – make it constructive, so that the person looks forward to bringing their next piece for comment. When giving verbal feedback, make a point of saying that this is your view and this is how you reacted to the piece.

Witwatersrand Woodworking Association © Copyright				Date		
Name of Turner		Tick Category	Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced	
Description of turning			Type of wood?			
Turner's comments	(What was successful, and what not? If you were to make another, what would you do differently?)					
Evaluators						
Scoring – fill in one row only	Technical (Subtotals 60/40/30)			Artistic (Subtotals 40/60/70)		Total (100)
	Craftsmanship	Degree of Difficulty	Quality of Finish	Impact (Visual)	Design	
Beginner	/40	/10	/10	/20	/20	
Intermediate	/20	/10	/10	/30	/30	
Advanced	/10	/10	/10	/35	/35	
Comments						
Critique: What was most pleasing about this piece?						
What could have been improved?						