

## Taking Criticism: A Guide for Students

Part of getting the most out of your college education is learning how to accept criticism. In fact, being able to be “teachable” or “coachable” is key to success not only in college, but in the workplace, too.

The following pointers can help you understand how to grow from criticism to your work instead of feeling attacked or hurt.

- 1. Distance yourself from the critique.** Read or listen to your instructor’s remarks carefully and let some time go by before challenging the grade or critique. Go back to the assignment to see if you might have misread it.
- 2. Consider your role in the critique.** As you consider the feedback, think about how you may have contributed to it. Did you follow instructions? Meet the assignment’s parameters? Understand that instructors find it particularly frustrating to receive assignments that blatantly ignore clearly laid out directions. Acknowledge your own part in the critique.
- 3. Remember that professors are human.** Although most professors try to take students’ feelings into consideration when giving criticism, they may deliver their message in frustration or anger. In some cases, a professor simply has a blunt style. Try to ignore the delivery and instead concentrate on understanding the problem. It is more useful to analyze feedback dispassionately.
- 4. Don’t forget that criticism is not personal.** Realize that professors likely have no reason to single you out for undeserved criticism (unless you have given them one!) No one likes being wrong, but it’s normal to not “get” something the first time out. Put defensive feelings aside.
- 5. Make sure you understand the criticism.** Ask thoughtful questions that show you want to avoid making the same mistake. If your professor is not making something clear, explain what would make you understand the critique better.
- 6. Avoid asking your professor what you can do to get an “A.”** Professors are there to teach you to find answers, not to *give* you answers. Instead, use open-ended questions such as “How might I approach this so I improve next time?”
- 7. Attend office hours.** Take the time to meet with your professor to obtain further explanations or to discuss difficulties you are having. Professors want their students to succeed.
- 8. Thank your professor for the feedback—and move on.** If someone has taken the time to offer you feedback—whether it’s a coach, parent, or teacher—you should be appreciative whether you agree with the assessment or not. Once you’ve done that, let go of any bitterness you may feel. You cannot please everyone all of the time. Learn from your mistakes and feel proud that you have behaved in a mature and gracious manner.