Structured Design Critique

Get useful feedback, not just opinions. Structured critique focuses discussion on design goals and user needs. It avoids personal preferences. Unstructured critique often becomes unproductive "I like / I don't like" debates.

2 hours
Facilitation
Intermediate

H HOW TO RUN

1 Present Context — 10 min

(10 minutes):

Designer shares the problem being solved, target audience, goals, constraints, and specific feedback needed. This frames the discussion. Critique without context becomes random opinions. Make goals explicit.

2 Silent Review — 15 min

(15 minutes):

Everyone reviews the design silently. Take notes on what works, what doesn't, what's unclear, and questions that arise. Silent review prevents groupthink.

3 Structured Feedback: Goals Alignment — 20 min

(20 minutes):

Discuss whether the design serves the stated goals. Where does it succeed? Where does it fall short? Focus on objectives, not aesthetics. "This layout makes comparison easy" is better than "I don't like the layout."

4 Structured Feedback: User Needs — 20 min

(20 minutes):

Discuss whether the design serves user needs. Where might users struggle? What's confusing? What's missing? Ground discussion in user behavior, not personal taste. "Users might not see this CTA" is better than "I would move the CTA."

5 Structured Feedback: Specific Concerns — 30 min

(30 minutes):

Address the designer's specific questions. If they asked about navigation, discuss navigation. Respect their focus. Don't introduce unrelated issues.

6 Synthesis and Next Steps — 25 min

(25 minutes):

Designer summarizes what they learned, what they will change, what needs more exploration, and what they are keeping. Critique is input, not a decree. The designer decides how to use the feedback.

KEY TIP

The facilitator role is critical. Without a facilitator, the critique can go off the rails.

O OBJECTIVES

- Generate actionable feedback focused on design goals
- Separate personal preference from objective assessment
- Surface concerns without crushing designer motivation
- Build team capability for constructive design discussion

M MATERIALS

- ☐ Design artifacts to review (screens, prototypes, flows)
- ☐ Design goals and context document
- ☐ Note-taking materials
- ☐ Projector or screen sharing for group review
- ☐ Timer

P PARTICIPANTS

4 to 8 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- The facilitator enforces time limits, redirects off-topic discussions, prevents personal attacks, ensures everyone speaks, and keeps the focus on goals.
- Don't skip facilitation. It's easy to let things slide, but you'll regret it.
- Distinguish between preference and assessment. "I don't like blue" is a preference.
- "Blue on blue has poor contrast" is an assessment. Teach people to ground feedback in principles, not personal taste.
- When someone says "I prefer," ask "Why?" to uncover the reasoning.
- People often want to redesign in real-time. Prevent this. The question isn't "What would you do?" but "Does this work for the goals and users?"
- Alternative approaches can be explored later, if necessary.
- Critique involves vulnerability. If the culture punishes designers for showing their work, they'll hide it until it's "perfect" (which never happens).
- Create a safe environment. Feedback is about the work, not the person.
- Acknowledge what works before addressing concerns.
- Critique generates input. The designer makes the decisions. If the team votes 7-1 for a change, but the designer disagrees, the designer might be right.
- They have context that others lack. Critique isn't a democracy.