

## DEALING WITH CRITICISM

When receiving—and giving—criticism some simple rules might help you to psychologically handle the criticism more constructively. Please carefully read each rule and think about its implications to you. Not all the rules will help but many of them might.

- ☺ When receiving criticism, listen for the “Ah-hah!” inner voice—the voice that confirms that the criticism is right on target
- ☺ Ignore criticism that is ambiguous, inaccurate, or personal in its attack. There is nothing to be gained from irresponsible criticism. The corollary is that you should always be wary when you write criticism that your comments are not ambiguous, inaccurate, or personal.
- ☺ In order to be a good writer, you have to be willing to be a bad one. Remember that even if you write a truly rotten piece, it is the necessary stepping-stone to better work. Growth requires “ugly duckling” stages.
- ☺ Pay attention to those comments that seem to support what you’re trying to say. Make sure when you give comments that you include some positive ones as well as critical ones.
- ☺ Pay attention to those points that the reader does not understand. Remember that you’re not writing to impress other scientists; you’re writing for real people who need to understand what you’re trying to say.
- ☺ Finally, remember that the opinion of others can be very valuable. You may be surprised and find that your critics greatly admire your work even if you don’t. A writer complained to a friend that he had finished a novel that was really terrible and, what was worse, it was the best he could do. The writer was John Steinbeck and the book was *The Grapes of Wrath*.

from Nancy Semotiuk, *The Teaching Professor*,  
August/September 1998