# THE TOOLKIT

A collection of resources designed to provide practical tools for women and non-binary undergraduate students.

Receiving Constructive Criticism

Constructive criticism (as opposed to destructive) is the process of offering opinions on the work of others that are both valid and well-reasoned. The most effective constructive criticism involves both positive and negative comments delivered in a friendly manner. Constructive criticism can provide people with a new perspective and help them grow both professionally and personally - it offers people a chance for improvement. Despite knowing the importance of constructive criticism, it can still be difficult to receive. This issue of the Toolkit will cover how to effectively receive and utilize this feedback.
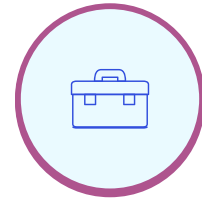
"GROWTH AND COMFORT NEVER COEXIST."
- GINNI ROMETTI | FORMER CEO OF IBM

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Tips & Tools

1 Take a step back. Your initial reaction may be to defend yourself when somebody offers criticism, even if it's constructive. By being quick to defend yourself, you will give the impression that you are unable to handle negative feedback and it will prevent you from taking the criticism objectively. This reaction will likely also signal to the person giving feedback that they should stop meaning you'll miss out on an opportunity for growth and improvement.

2 Be wary of facial expressions & body language. It's not enough to hold in your defensive comments, you need to also hold in your defensive body language. Try not to roll your eyes, cross your arms or frown while receiving feedback - these emotional cues will similarly signal to the person providing feedback that you're not open to criticism. In a professional setting, giving off the impression of being unwilling to accept criticism will stall your ability for growth, both in terms of professional skills as well as growth within an organization.

3 Don't take it as an insult. Constructive criticism is meant to spark growth and improvement, it's not meant to be a personal attack. As long as the feedback is about your work (as in the quality of output or the method you utilized to accomplish a goal), you should take it in good faith and graciously accept it. If you find that the criticism being offered strays from being focused on your work or it feels disingenuous & not meant to spark improvement, feel free to ignore it.

4 Stop viewing mistakes as failures. This mindset is likely the reason you act defensively when receiving criticism. Making a mistake means you're human and that you can still learn and improve at your work. Each misstep is a lesson to be learned and everyone needs to find their footing no matter where they are in their professional life.

5 Find ways to utilize this criticism for improvement. Start by asking for specifics - what you did incorrectly, what makes it incorrect and how they think you should do it the next time. By fully understanding where you went wrong you can properly address it in the future. Once you fully understand your mistake, get a second opinion. Criticism is subjective no matter the topic, seek the opinion of someone who can give unbiased feedback. Now you can take action - determine a plan for improvement that includes evaluating what went wrong, why it happened in the first place, determine how to avoid that same situation again and identify what you should have done differently.

Tips inspired by - "How to Take Constructive Criticism like a Professional" by Charley Mendoza

Further Reading

"How to Accept (and Make Use of) Constructive Criticism" by Shaunta Grimes | The Write Brain

"Taking Constructive Criticism like a Champ" by The Muse | Forbes

"5 Tips for Gracefully Accepting Constructive Criticism" by Jacqueline Whitmore | Entrepreneur

Note from the Author

Receiving and utilizing constructive criticism is one of the most difficult professional skills to master. I still need to make a conscious effort to maintain my composure and listen actively when I'm getting feedback particularly from supervisors I'm not that fond of. I of course know the benefits of feedback and I often actively seek it but it's still a struggle when it's not all positive. It will take a lot of time and practice before this skill is mastered but it'll be worth it in the long run. - Sam Collins, MA.

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