

# Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process<sup>SM</sup>

## THE BASICS

Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process<sup>SM</sup> helps to shape constructive dialogues about works-in-progress. Using a series of steps guided by a facilitator, it affords both the maker and a group of responders a chance to ask questions, share reactions, and voice opinions with the goal of building a stronger work of art. The Process offers artists valuable information and engages professional peers, audiences, and community members in the art-making process. Beyond its application in the arts, the Process contains useful approaches for all kinds of feedback conversations at home and in varied work settings.

The Critical Response Process is outlined briefly below. We encourage people interested in using the Process to order *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process*, a 62-page book available from Dance Exchange, which offers a more in-depth exploration of the process and concrete guidance for facilitators. For information on webinars, trainings, and further study opportunities, visit [LizLerman.com](http://LizLerman.com).

### THE ROLES

- The **artist** offers a work-in-progress for review and feels prepared to question that work in a dialogue with other people.
- One, a few, or many **responders** -- committed to the artist's intent to make excellent work -- engage in the dialogue with the artist.
- The **facilitator**, initiates each step, keeps the process on track, and works to help the artist and responders use the process to frame useful questions and responses.

### THE PROCESS

The Critical Response Process takes place after a presentation of artistic work. Work can be short or long, large or small, and at any stage in its development.

### THE CORE STEPS

1. **Statements of Meaning:** Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
2. **Artist as Questioner:** The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. **Neutral Questions:** Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are *neutral* when they do *not* have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, "Why was it so dark?" is not a neutral question. "What ideas guided your choices about lighting?" is.
4. **Opinion Time:** Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is "I have an opinion about \_\_\_\_\_, would you like to hear it?" The artist has the option to say no.

### **A Note on Fix-its:**

Sometimes responders will want to offer “fix-its” (suggestions for changes) during Step 4. Whether “fix-its” are appropriate depends on many factors, including the relationship between the artist and the responders, how advanced the work is in its development, and the artist’s own style and preference. To manage these variables, facilitators can take a couple of measures at the beginning of the Process:

- Allow artists to state whether they welcome fix-its. If an artist says no, the facilitator may need to intervene in Step 4, guiding responder who may still want to pose fix-its to frame the opinion that underlies the suggestion. If an artist says yes, responders in Step 4 who have fix-its should say, “I have an opinion *that includes a suggestion* about...”
- Acknowledge that the desire to get involved in the process of shaping work is natural and creative, but that artists may gain more if they follow a path to their own solutions. Encourage responders who immediately jump to ideas for changes to use steps of the Process to get at the issue that their fix-it is intended to address. This means mentally backing up through the Process before taking part in it: first formulating the opinion underlying their fix-it, and then framing a neutral question addresses the focus of the opinion.

### **MORE STEPS**

- A. What’s Your Next Step?:** After step four, artists talk about the next steps they are planning based on information gained through the Process.
- B. Subject Matter Discussion:** Sometimes a work will generate a vital discussion about an issue of social or aesthetic controversy. An added step to discuss the issue itself allows the artist to get additional useful information but avoids sidetracking the Process away from the art itself during the four core steps.
- C. Working the Work:** Sometimes a Critical Response session can move directly into “labbing” aspects of the work, with the participation of some or all of those participating in the Process.

Liz Lerman’s Critical Response Process<sup>SM</sup>  
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Liz Lerman’s *Critical Response Process: A method for getting useful feedback on anything you make from dance to dessert* offers a comprehensive overview of the process, its inner workings and variations. It is available in both book and e-book form from Amazon or, for bulk orders of 20 copies or more, from Dance Exchange [www.danceexchange.org](http://www.danceexchange.org)