

# **English II**

## **Short Answer Single Selection Scoring Guide**

**April 2014**

Read the selection and choose the best answer to each question. Then fill in the answer on your answer document.

## Is *Criticism* a Four-Letter Word?

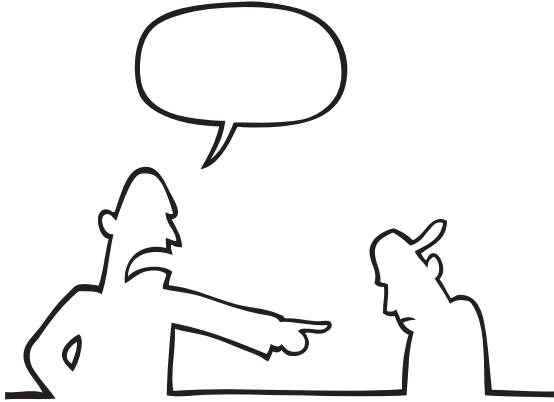
by Steven Frank

- 1 The movie was *E.T.* The moment we stepped out of the theater, my older brother asked the dreaded question: "What did you think of the film?"
- 2 Whatever opinion I held of the "film" was about to be shredded.
- 3 "I'll tell you as soon as I go to the bathroom."
- 4 He followed me in.
- 5 Turning away for maximum privacy, I confessed that I had liked the movie. It had moved me.
- 6 "Well," my brother said, "I found it maudlin and manipulative. 'E.T. phone home.' Honestly, Steve."
- 7 I spent the rest of my childhood keeping my opinions of books and movies to myself.
- 8 Since then, I've spent a lot of time wondering whether *criticism* is a four-letter word. Of course, I can count nine letters there, but is the spirit of the word offensive? I decided to ask my students what they thought, so I wrote *criticism* on the board, and we played the first-word-that-comes-to mind game.
- 9 *Judgmental, mean, nasty, and hurtful* were the top four responses.
- 10 "Is all criticism negative?" I asked.
- 11 The consensus was yes.
- 12 I tried a different word: *review*.
- 13 *Opinion, evaluation, advice, and guide*, they responded.
- 14 It may be a question of semantics. People don't like the word *criticize* because it's what they think their parents always do: *Your room could double for the city dump*.
- 15 Is it any wonder that parents often hear their anguished teens shouting, "Why do you always criticize me?"
- 16 Suppose we swapped words—and attitudes. "Mom, I'd like you to review my room, please."

- 17 "Review it?"
- 18 "Yes. Evaluate it. Constructively. Sensibly."
- 19 Then a conversation might take place. "Well, honey, I've noticed some specific hazards there. The DVDs on the floor, for instance, are slippery, and if you step on one in the middle of the night, you might fall. Further, that turkey sandwich you forgot to throw away is starting to grow mold. And if you wanted to invite a friend over, it might help if you cleared a space on your chair for him to sit down."
- 20 Notice that in this scenario, the parent is supporting her opinion with concrete evidence. The criticism feels less, well, *critical*, because it makes sense. And that's what a good piece of criticism ought to do.
- 21 Suppose you're asked to write a critical evaluation of a book. Don't just trash it. You should take an honest look at what works about it and what doesn't. Start with an opinion, but be sure to back up that opinion by answering a few key questions: Are the characters credible? Do they think, feel, and act like human beings (even if they're aliens)? The poet Marianne Moore once described what readers want in literature as "imaginary gardens with real toads." The setting of a book can be as outrageous as a strange world down a rabbit hole, but the characters that live there must seem believable.
- 22 They should also be well rounded. Look for characters that seem real, not stereotypical. Good heroes have flaws; good villains have fans. Take Satan, for example, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. He's so charming, he's hard to hate.
- 23 Also ask whether the main character evolves. Harry Potter gains confidence. Hamlet finds his voice (a little late). Alice learns how to read strangers in Wonderland. In a good book, the protagonist grows.
- 24 A book's plot should be believable too. Do the turning points lead the reader to the next in a credible, even inevitable, chain of events? A plot with too many coincidences is contrived. Most action movies have contrived plots—the hero walks through a swarm of bullets and is never hit, then turns and fires a single shot to defeat his enemy. (Stories like that can be great fun; they're just not great literature.)
- 25 A well-crafted plot surprises you with believable twists. I'm still thrilled every time I find out that Charlie inherits the chocolate factory, because everything leading up to that outcome has been quietly pointing the way.
- 26 The best critics don't just spew their opinions; they help you form and deepen yours by examining an experience so carefully as to see it inside out.
- 27 In school, you're probably most often assigned book reviews or movie reviews, but don't let your critical eye glaze over on those familiar genres.

Try writing a restaurant review (it's a great excuse to go out to dinner). Review a video game, a blog, or a new album. Review a building that just went up downtown or a date you went on. And if your parents are being hypercritical, ask them if they wouldn't mind a little constructive evaluation in the form of a parent review.

### How to Offer Constructive Criticism



Whether in our personal or professional lives, we sometimes find the need to address problems or conflicts with friends, family members, or colleagues. Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when delivering constructive criticism.

- Focus on facts, not feelings. Just state the problem and keep emotion out of it.
- Be specific. Explain what your criticism relates to, in detail.
- Be timely. Discuss a situation as soon as your emotions cool.
- Be direct but tactful. Make sure that you use the words that you actually mean, instead of searching for a softer word that doesn't really make your point.
- Give feedback in private. You don't need to embarrass someone in front of an audience. Take the person aside and speak with him or her one-on-one.
- Know what you want to say. You may even want to write down key points so that you don't forget anything or get sidetracked.
- Listen to what the other person has to say. After you speak your mind, listen to the other side of the story. You may not be aware of some circumstances. Keep an open mind, listen, and be sure to communicate regularly.

Illustration courtesy of © iStockphoto.com/Colin Cramm

- 28 It's taken me 30 years to learn something critical about criticism. Criticism isn't just an attack; it's a defense. If I had been trained to think critically, I could have defended my opinion of *E.T.* I could have countered my brother's dismissive "maudlin and manipulative" by saying, "Well, I think the movie is convincing. What lonely boy doesn't need a friend, especially a friend with magic powers to heal wounds and make bicycles fly? And if you got lost a few billion miles from your family, wouldn't *you* want to phone home too?"

29 Why write criticism? Because if you write your opinions—and support them with good, logical thinking—you’ll be something that I wish I’d been as a teen.

30 Confident.

31 And that’s another nine-letter word.

By Steven Frank

## **English II Short Answer Single Selection**

In “Is *Criticism* a Four-Letter Word?,” how does the author feel about criticism? Support your answer with evidence from the selection.

## **Score Point 0 — Insufficient Response to the Question**

**Insufficient responses indicate a very limited reading performance.**

These responses have one of the following problems.

- ❑ The idea is not an answer to the question asked.
- ❑ The idea is incorrect because it is not based on the text.
- ❑ The idea is too general, vague, or unclear to determine whether it is reasonable.
- ❑ No idea is present. Sometimes the response contains only text evidence. At other times there appears to be an idea; however, this idea cannot be considered an answer to the question because it merely repeats verbatim, or “echoes,” the text evidence.

The author feels like he should have not told his brother that the movie was interesting and good, his brother just keeps telling him, the movie was boring and not good and bothers him just over a movie.

**Score Point 0**

This response is insufficient because the idea is not an answer to the question asked. The question asks how the author feels about criticism, not whether he should have shared his opinion with his brother.

The author thinks that criticism is mostly a bad thing because his brother criticized his opinion about the movie E.T. "Whatever opinion I held of the 'film' was about to be shredded." "I spent the rest of my childhood keeping my opinions of books and movies to myself." Those two quotes from the story are indicative of the authors opinion about criticism, he knew that his brother was going to criticize his opinion and as a result of that he started keeping his opinions to himself.

**Score Point 0**

In this response the student presents the idea that the author thinks that criticism is bad. While the author acknowledges that criticism can be negative, the claim that it is mostly a bad thing is based only on the first seven paragraphs and indicates a misreading of the selection overall. Because the idea is incorrect, the textual evidence provided is irrelevant. Therefore, this response is insufficient.



The Author feels very strongly about criticism. He feels that criticism should be given all the time because, it makes people better at what they do or trying to do.

**Score Point 0**

The student presents an idea that is too vague to determine whether it is reasonable. The idea that criticism should be given all the time is not specific enough to be considered a valid answer to the question asked.

In *Is Criticism a Four-letter Word?* How does the author feel about criticism? Support your answer with evidence from the selection. Since then I've spent a lot of time wondering whether criticism is a four-letter word. Of course, I can count nine letters there, but is the spirit of the word offensive? I decided to ask my students what they thought, so I wrote criticism on the board, and we played the first word that comes to mind game.

**Score Point 0**

The student provides the question and text from the selection, but the student does not offer an idea. Because no idea is presented, this response indicates a very limited reading performance.

## **Score Point 1 — Partially Sufficient Response to the Question**

**Partially sufficient responses indicate a basic reading performance.**

These responses have one of the following characteristics.

- ❑ The idea is reasonable, but the response contains no text evidence.
- ❑ The idea is reasonable, but the text evidence is flawed and does not adequately support the idea. Text evidence is considered inadequate when it is
  - only a general reference to the text,
  - too partial to support the idea,
  - weakly linked to the idea, or
  - used inappropriately because it wrongly manipulates the meaning of the text.
- ❑ The idea needs more explanation or specificity even though it is supported with text evidence.
- ❑ The idea represents only a literal reading of the text, with or without text evidence.

The author provides a new perspective on criticism by offering ways to use it positively, constructively, and in good manner rather than a harsh, negative, un motivating way. He shows us that criticism is not a negative thing but something that can be motivating and inspiring and I personally now see criticism in a new way.

**Score Point 1**

The student presents the reasonable idea that the author provides a new perspective on criticism by offering ways to use it positively and constructively, as opposed to harshly and negatively. Although additional analysis is offered, no textual evidence is provided to support the idea. Therefore, this response is only partially sufficient.

The author doesn't like the word criticism, much rather review or evaluation. In paragraph 26, the author makes a point about supporting an opinion with evidence. The author feels as if you should benefit from criticism, not put down as his brother did to him. Also you have to be open minded and take in criticism in order to be more confident as he said in paragraph 29. So overall, The author feels that criticism is a good thing if you are pointing out flaws to help others and not bring them down while providing evidence of your opinion.

**Score Point 1**

The student offers the reasonable idea that the author prefers the words “review” or “evaluation” over “criticism” because criticism should be beneficial. Although the student attempts to support this idea with evidence from the text, the evidence is flawed. The student provides only general text references rather than specific textual support. For this reason, the student’s reading performance is considered basic.

The author feels that criticism is actually a good thing for people "The criticism feels less, well, critical, because it makes sense. And that's what a good piece of criticism ought to do!" This shows that criticism when used right can actually make a confident person instead of offending a person.

**Score Point 1**

The student presents the reasonable idea that criticism can make a person confident when used correctly. However, the textual evidence provided is flawed because it is only weakly linked to this idea. The text supports the idea that criticism feels less critical and makes more sense when it is properly given; the text does not support the idea that it makes a person confident. Therefore, this response indicates only a basic reading performance.

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In "Is Criticism a Four-Letter Word?" the author feels criticism is something good because, he says "Criticism isn't just an attack; it's a defense." and "critical, because it makes sense." To the author criticism is something really important and part of life because, she says "Because if you write your opinions - and support them with good, logical thinking - you'll be something that I wish I'd been as a teen."

**Score Point 1**

The student offers the general idea that the author feels criticism is good because it is a really important part of life. Although textual evidence is provided as support, the idea needs more explanation or specificity. Therefore, this response is only partially sufficient.

## **Score Point 2 — Sufficient Response to the Question**

**Sufficient responses indicate a satisfactory reading performance.**

These responses have the following characteristics.

- ❑ The idea is reasonable and goes beyond a literal reading of the text. It is explained specifically enough to show that the student can make appropriate connections across the text and draw valid conclusions.
- ❑ The text evidence used to support the idea is accurate and relevant.
- ❑ The idea and text evidence used to support it are clearly linked.
- ❑ The combination of the idea and the text evidence demonstrates a good understanding of the text.

The author feels that people are using criticism the wrong way. People should use it constructively and responsibly. "Why write criticism? Because if you write your opinions - and support them with good, logical thinking - you'll be something that I wish I'd been as a teen." "Criticism isn't just an attack; it's a defense." These quotes state that the author feels that if you're going to criticize, do it the right way.

**Score Point 2**

The student presents the reasonable idea that the author feels criticism should be used constructively and responsibly. The student provides relevant quotations that support the idea, making this a sufficient response.

In "Is criticism a Four letter word?", the author believes that criticism does not always need to be hurtful, it can also be helpful. The author says, "The best critics don't just spew their opinions; they help you form and deepen yours..." Criticism is often solely used to belittle someone, when it would be better used in helping someone.

**Score Point 2**

The student presents the reasonable idea that the author believes criticism does not always need to be hurtful; it can also be helpful. The student provides a direct quotation that shows how criticism can help others to form and deepen their own opinions. The student demonstrates a good understanding of the selection.



The author of "Is Criticism a Four-letter Word?" feels that when someone is criticizing a piece of literature or a movie, they should look at the elements of the story, and honestly review it. In "Is Criticism a Four-letter Word?", he says "Suppose you asked to write a critical evaluation of a book. Don't just trash it. You should take an honest look at what works and what doesn't." The author says this to make sure criticism isn't just your own opinion, but a well thought out review of the story.

**Score Point 2**

The student offers the reasonable idea that criticism is not only an opinion but also a well-thought-out review of a book or movie. The direct quotation provided is clearly linked to the idea and shows that the student can draw a valid conclusion. This response represents a satisfactory reading performance.

The author believes criticism can be quite harsh and that everyone believes it's bad. But the author states that criticism is kinda the same as a review and a lot of people don't know that. The author says criticism needs to be constructive and have evidence to back it up. Like when he was talking about parents criticising their teens about their messy rooms, "Notice that in this scenario, the parent is supporting her opinion with concrete evidence!"

**Score Point 2**

The student presents the reasonable idea that the author believes many people who view criticism negatively overlook the fact that it can function as a review. The student offers an analysis of this idea and supports this analysis with clearly linked text. Although the analysis is stronger than the text evidence, the combination of the two shows that the student has a good understanding of the selection.

## **Score Point 3 — Exemplary Response to the Question**

**Exemplary responses indicate an accomplished reading performance.**

These responses have the following characteristics.

- ❑ The idea is perceptive and reflects an awareness of the complexities of the text. The student is able to develop a coherent explanation of the idea by making discerning connections across the text.
- ❑ The text evidence used to support the idea is specific and well chosen. Overall, the evidence strongly supports the validity of the idea.
- ❑ The combination of the idea and the text evidence demonstrates a deep understanding of the text.



The author of "Is Criticism a Four Letter Word" feels that criticism is okay as long as it is presented in a respectful and constructive manner. When feelings, personal opinions, and insults become involved, the "criticism" turns into more of a personal attack. The author would prefer that criticism be presented in a more "review" like way rather than a critique. If facts are presented, it makes the situation less personal. For example, in paragraph 19 the author gives an example of a mother reviewing her child's bedroom. In the following paragraph the author writes "Notice that in this scenario, the parent is supporting her opinion with concrete evidence. The criticism feels less, well, critical, because it makes sense. And that's what a good piece of criticism ought to do." The author believes that criticism should be more factual than personal.

**Score Point 3**

The student develops a coherent explanation of the author's belief that criticism should function more as a review based on facts than as a critique based on personal opinions. By making discerning connections across the selection and including well-chosen text evidence, the student strongly supports the explanation provided, making this an exemplary response.

The author in "Is Criticism a Four-Letter Word?" thinks that criticism can be used constructively if used correctly. The author says "the best critics don't just spew their opinions; they help you form and deepen yours." This shows that he thinks critics that do their job correctly can have a positive effect on someone's opinion. The author even says using criticism correctly makes you "confident." He chose this word with a positive connotation to emphasize the effect proper criticism can have.

**Score Point 3**

The student presents the perceptive idea that the author feels criticism can have a positive effect and can make a person confident as long as it is used constructively. The student shows an awareness of the complexities of the text by recognizing that the author uses the positive connotation of the word "confident" to emphasize the positive effect of "criticism." The student uses well-chosen quotations to strongly support the validity of the idea. This response indicates that the student's reading performance is accomplished.

The author of this selection believes that criticism, if used sensibly and productively, can result in confidence. He encourages the reader to engage in constructive criticism as if it were a review. He explains that providing your opinion is being confident in yourself. He uses his past experiences, "It's taken me 30 years to learn something critical about criticism. Criticism isn't just an attack; it's a defense." to show how he regrets not thinking critically, "If I had been trained to think critically, I could have defended my opinion..." He closes stating "Why write criticism?... you'll be something that I wish I'd been as a teen. confident."

**Score Point 3**

The student makes a discerning connection across the selection by explaining that the author has gained confidence by learning how to think critically, something he regrets he did not learn earlier in his life. The student supports this analysis with a series of direct quotations that specifically show the author's regret. The combination of the analysis and text evidence shows that the student has a deep understanding of the text.

Steven Franke, author of "Is Criticism a Four-Lettered word?" believes the word "criticism" to mean an analytical, constructive review that offers one's thoughts about a situation without any interfering emotions. "The best critics don't just spew out their opinions; they help you form and deepen yours by examining our experience so carefully as to see it inside out." Criticism should not be a directed attack on one's actions or thoughts; but rather a defense of one's own thoughts to guide the other person in seeing the light in your stance.

**Score Point 3**

In this exemplary response, the student presents the perceptive idea that the author believes criticism to mean an analytical, constructive review that offers one's thoughts about a situation without any interfering emotions. The idea reflects an awareness of the complexities of the selection, and the well-chosen direct quotation from the selection strongly supports the idea. This response represents an accomplished reading performance.