One of the best ways to improve as a photographer is frequent critiquing, giving it as well as and receiving it. When I attended Columbia College here in Chicago, each week we would post our latest assignments. We would then introduce our work with a statement about what we were trying to accomplish. Then the instructor, and the class would comment on it. Sometimes this was not easy for me or the class and depending on how awake the class was at 8:30 am it may or may not have been constructive, but I always learned something from the feedback that they gave me.

The point of critiquing is to give you feedback on your skills and how you can improve. It's also important in the process to learn to critique another's work. Tell them what you see, as their audience. But make it clear when you are stating a fact like "it's a bit out of focus," or "my eye is taken in two different directions" versus an opinion – which composition and framing often are. Opinions are fine, if stated as such, and as you know we all have them…

So let's look at the steps to take to critique. Here's a mental checklist to go through and see how the photograph holds up.

1. How is the **technical** quality? Let's start here before we get to the more subjective issues of composition and emotion.

    In focus? (or if not, was that intended?)
    Exposure: Is it too light or dark? Are there blown out or underexposed areas?
    Use of **depth of field** to control the viewer's eye.
    Use of **contrast?** Too muddy or too much contrast.
    How was **lighting** handled?
    How do the **colors** look?

2. How's the **composition**?

 Framing?
 What should and shouldn't be in the frame?
 Where is your **eye drawn** to?

3. How is the **emotional appeal?**

 What **emotion** do you feel when you look at the photo? Or lack of?
 Did the photographer **connect** with his subjects or do they look tense, posed or stilted?
 Does the photograph **tell a story**, or part of one? (It could be as simple as, "here are my
 kids who I adore" or "here's my dog catching a Frisbee." Or a very deep one such as, "this
 is what poverty looks like, right in my hometown.")

4. Other visual elements such as
 Balance
 Exposure
 Does it have a clear subject?
 Are there anything distracting in the image?

Make your statements constructive, which means as you state what you see offer possible
solutions. If you give suggestions you will help the photographer figure out how to improve their
photo next go around. You have also spent the time to figure out what you need to do which
forces you to really think about photography.
Also consider your audience. To quote a famous writer, "Everything ain't for everybody".

You are not only learning but you are helping others learn. When you figure out what you like
about photos you can internalize it to try and achieve the same thing in your own photos.

KC