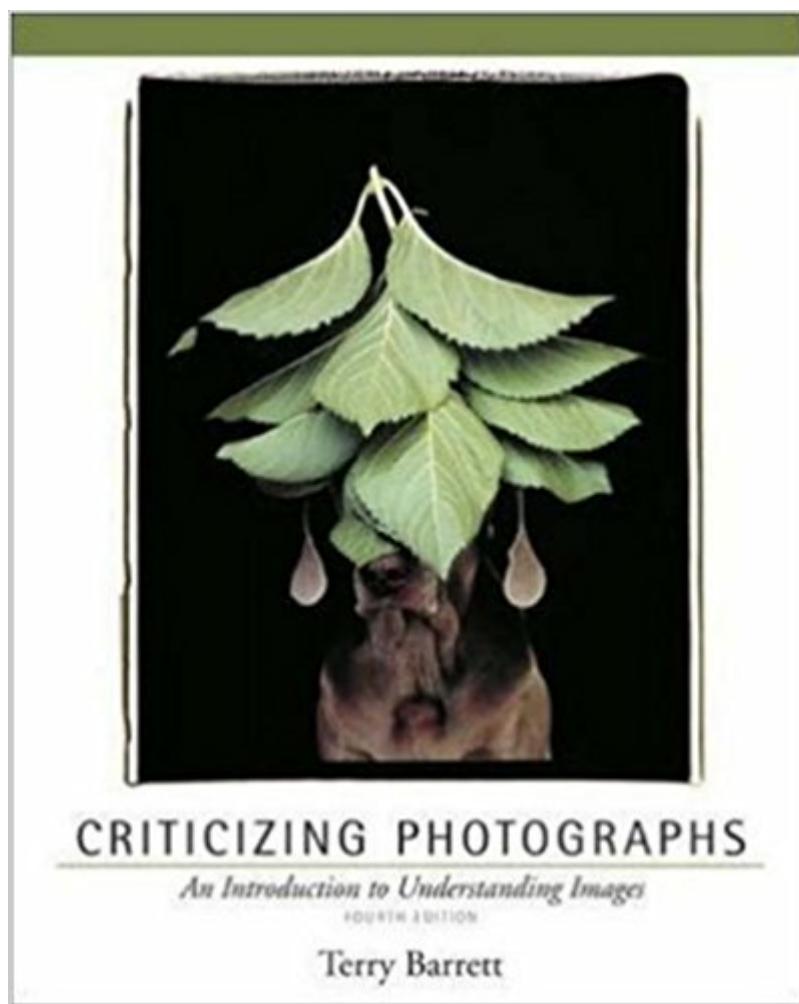


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# Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction To Understanding Images



## **Synopsis**

This brief text is designed to help both beginning and advanced students of photography better develop and articulate thoughtful criticism. Organized around the major activities of criticism (describing, interpreting, evaluating, and theorizing), *Criticizing Photographs* provides a clear framework and vocabulary for students' critical skill development. The fourth edition includes new black and white and color images, updated commentary, a completely revised chapter on theory that offers a broad discussion of digital images, and an expanded chapter eight on studio critiques and writing about photographs, plus examples of student writing and critique.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Terry Barrett is Professor of Art Education, with a joint appointment in the Department of Art, at The Ohio State University, where he is the recipient of a distinguished teaching award for courses in criticism and aesthetics within education. He has authored four books: *Interpreting Art: Reflecting, Wondering and Responding*; *Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary* (2nd ed.); *Criticizing Photographs: An Introduction to Understanding Images* (4th ed.); and *Talking about Student Art*. He edited the anthology *Lessons for Teaching Art Criticism*, published articles in *Aesthetic Education*, *Afterimage*, *Art Education*, *Exposure*, *Camera-Lucida*, *Dialogue*, *Cultural Research in Art Education*, *New Advocate*, *New Art Examiner*, *Studies in Art Education*, *Teaching Artist Journal*, *Theory into Practice*, *Visual Arts Research*, and many chapters in edited books. He is an art critic in education for the Ohio Arts Council, consults museum education departments, juries exhibitions, and conducts workshops on studio critiques and writing.

Teachers of art and design, specialists in the fields of media studies, cross-cultural education, social anthropology, and literary criticism will find fertile ground here for both personal study and teaching. It is documented with extracts from critical writings, biographical details of trends and movements in the history of photography, anecdotes about individual photographers, and a telling section of visuals, most of which are commented on in length. This is no dry academic exercise; here is a probing exploration of the links between theory and practice in the aesthetics of criticism. Journal of Art and Design Education, Michael Rawding

The content provides a new perspective in looking at photography, especially looking at my own photography. I have learned some things. Some concepts were challenging to my belief sets while concurrently confirming some old suspicions about the formation of public opinion. My purchase and review is based on a used 4th Edition. The book was worth the ten bucks. This free review?....you get what you pay for :)

This is the best book I've ever read about HOW to judge a photograph. No, it isn't a theory of photography, advocating one critical stance to the exclusion of others. It's about DOING criticism, and the means by which someone can thoughtfully evaluate whether a photograph works. In this regard, it is unequaled. Having been deeply involved in the photographic arts for over 40 years, I have rarely encountered a book that's given me so much to think about conceptually. Don't let the negative reviews dissuade you. Invariably, these reviews are judging this work for being what is not meant to be i.e. a critical treatise advocating a certain way of evaluating a photograph premised on certain criteria. It's not meant to be that. Instead, it gives you a framework within which to use whatever critical theory you advocate to thoughtfully evaluate a work. Exceptionally well done.

I was looking for something to give me a feel for how the "academic community" teaches someone how to write effective criticism of photographs, and this book gave me that information. It showed a clear methodology for approaching and writing a critical review of a photograph, which is what I wanted to learn. It also provided some information on different kinds of critical theories. It was certainly worth the price, at least for me, in terms of what I was hoping to learn.

Very in-depth and informative.

When I reviewed the third edition of this book several years ago, I didn't rate it highly, but I thought that perhaps the fourth edition might be a better book, and it is. Despite its subtitle, which might lead you to believe it is about understanding pictures, the bulk of this book is directed at formal criticism of photographs. After an introductory chapter on the nature of criticism, Barrett suggests a process for criticizing photographs that includes description, interpretation and judgment. The author also suggests a classification scheme for photographs which he believes could be useful in forming judgments, although I found it no better than many other taxonomies and at times difficult to apply to many photographs. Throughout he mentions many schools of analysis, like formalism and feminism and shows how these schools might influence criticism. He then launches a foray into photographic critical theory which is concise but accurate and which deals with such questions as the truth and morality of photography. He finally talks about the act of writing criticism and also about critiquing photographs. Barrett illustrates his points with many helpful examples of written criticism. Most of the examples deal with pictures of the modern or post-modern school, but the information is transferable to other kinds of photography. The book is illustrated with both color plates and black and white plates, although the black and white plates are spread throughout the book, which leads to a lot of page flipping. It would be nice if the next edition included a page number when these plates are referred to. The subtitle, "An Introduction to Understanding Images" might lead one to expect that there would be some insights into how and why photographs work but I became aware that Barrett presumed his audience would have some prior knowledge of this. Thus while he spoke of the importance of a photographer's technique in understanding a photo, there was no mention of how technique might be used to convey a photographer's vision. In the earlier edition, I found this a serious weakness, but it now seems clear that the author expects that this kind of information will come from somewhere else. On the other hand, the careful reader will derive some idea of what to look for in a photograph by reading the many examples. No one wanting to come to an understanding of how to read a photograph from a single volume will learn to do so from this book. In fact, no one volume is likely to do that, although a book like "The Photographer's Eye" by John Szarkowski would be a good place to start. On the other hand, for the individual who knows something about the nature of photography, or within the context of a larger course of study, this is a good book to begin to learn how to write photographic criticism.

As a person interested in the history of photography as well as a serious photographer, I've found this book to be a great help in getting the most out of a photograph. Unlike the snap judgments of a photo club, the book explains a logical sequence of steps to understanding. I found it especially

helpful in reviewing photographs which are hard to appreciate for aesthetic reasons. Highly recommended.

This was an item I purchased while in art school. I loved the book and its still very very helpful

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