time that you're criticizing. Unless you can give them the reinforcement that they're capable of fixing it, most people won't be able to get past the negative "you screwed up" message to listen to you and try to do better.

Accentuate the Positive

"Harry, that writing job you did was short and to the point, just as I requested. It made good sense and was well written. Thanks. Now—let's look at something that needs fixing . . . "

Before you tell him/her what was *wrong,* spend a little time on what went *right!* It sounds so self-evident but it's a common human failing: We get so focused on exploring the mistake that we don't hear how negative it all sounds, or that *something* went correctly.

If you praise before you criticize, people are more likely to listen to the criticism with both ears, knowing that you're not *totally* displeased and they're not *totally* deficient.

Be Specific

"Ruth, I didn't like the way you did the report, at all! It was generally dull and not too convincing. Do it over and make it shorter, and more interesting. "

What does Ruth do with this kind of criticism? What's "interesting"? And "shorter"? It *all* seems important; what should she leave out? (Also, notice that put-down of an opening line!)

General criticism is destructive. It doesn't lead anyone to know *how* to fix things; it just makes people feel bad. We all have different verbal and visual styles and conceive different ways to say the same thing. But, unless you can explain specifically, you haven't started *fixing* anything.

To help the criticized person know how to fix what *you* object to, define *exactly* what went wrong and why it is unsatisfactory. Most people are generally so sensitive to criticism that they'll say, "Yes, I understand," when they actually don't, just to get the criticism to end. Specific examples for improvement as well as specific descriptions of exactly what you mean are a must.

"Ruth, it's too long. To fix it, why not take out the detailed background sections? That will leave you with only the current status, which is fine. Then, you could include some examples and those customer letters as well as some visuals, perhaps. *That* should make it more interesting, which it needs, to be more effective."