

CORE

Lab 6: The Critique Pipeline Dossier

Prove that a working map is still worthy of publication

Chapter Chapter 6	Level Intermediate	Time ~100-130 min
Mode Individual or pair	Technology Any course-approved LLM	Deliverable Map concept under critique

Why This Lab Matters

Critique is not a complaint box at the end of production. It is a continuous method for asking whether a map's behavior, defaults, tone, evidence, and interaction logic still match its purpose. This lab asks you to critique a map concept as if another person must be able to reproduce your reasoning later.

Essential question

What cartographic decision should you be able to defend by the end of this lab?

Learning Objectives

- Distinguish technical functionality from cartographic fitness.
- Use description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation as critique lenses.
- Detect aesthetic, data, and ethical drift in an evolving map concept.
- Transform command prompts into critique prompts that surface trade-offs.
- Use metrics as signals without letting numbers replace judgment.

At a glance

Inputs: Lab scenario, prompts, data notes, or map concept supplied in the activity.

Outputs: Map concept under critique; Technical function versus cartographic critique table; Four-lens critique questions.

Evaluation: Clear purpose, defensible cartographic judgment, concise prompting, and evidence of human verification where needed.

LAB WORK

Setup: Choose a Map Concept to Put on Trial ~10 min

Use a prior lab map idea or choose one of the scenarios below. You do not need a finished map; you need a plausible map concept detailed enough to critique.

- Heat-risk map for older adults during summer emergencies
- Food access dashboard with grocery-store buffers
- Eviction filing map for tenant advocates
- Migration flow map for a public policy class
- School traffic-safety map for parents and planners

Map concept under critique

Topic:

Audience:

Purpose:

Default view:

Main layers:

Main interaction behaviors:

Most important claim:

Most sensitive or risky interpretation:

Evidence, source, or data limitation I would need to verify:

Setup deliverable

Create a folder or notes section titled Critique Dossier. Every prompt, LLM response excerpt, and human decision in this lab should be saved there.

PROCEDURE

Part 1 — Separate “It Works” from “It Is Right” ~15 min

Ask the LLM to identify what can be technically successful while still needing critique.

Act as a studio cartography critic. Review this map concept. Do not suggest fixes yet. Separate your response into two columns:

1. What appears technically functional
2. What still needs cartographic critique

Focus on purpose, audience, default state, interaction behavior, tone, attention, and claims. End with one sentence beginning: "The map works, but it may not yet be right because..."

Map concept:

[PASTE SETUP NOTES]

Mini-deliverable

Copy the final sentence into your dossier and write whether you agree, partly agree, or disagree.

PROCEDURE

Part 2 — Run the Four-Lens Critique ~20 min

Chapter 6 frames critique through description, analysis, interpretation, and evaluation. Run one prompt that keeps those lenses separate.

Critique this map concept using four lenses. Keep them separate.

Description: What does the map literally show and do?

Analysis: How do data, symbols, defaults, and interactions work together?

Interpretation: What does the map seem to argue, imply, or ask users to believe?

Evaluation: Do those effects support the stated purpose and audience?

For each lens, include one question a human reviewer should still answer.

Do not let the LLM collapse the critique into a checklist. Rewrite the most useful question from each lens in your own words.

PROCEDURE

Part 3 — Detect Design Drift ~20 min

Drift is not failure. It is what happens when iteration gradually changes what the map has become.

Audit this map concept for design drift. Use three categories:

- aesthetic drift
- data drift
- ethical drift

For each category, identify:

1. the original intent that might be drifting
2. the evidence of drift
3. who would be affected by the drift
4. whether the drift should be accepted, revised, or investigated
5. the prompt or design decision that may have introduced it

Do not recommend final fixes until after the audit table.

Mini-deliverable

Add a drift ledger to your dossier. At least one row must name a specific prompt wording, default view, interaction, or metric that introduced or amplified drift.

PROCEDURE

Part 4 — Convert Commands into Critique Prompts ~20 min

Command prompts often hide judgment. Critique prompts expose assumptions before deciding what to change.

Convert these command prompts into critique prompts for my map concept. Each critique prompt should reveal assumptions, trade-offs, or risks before prescribing a fix.

Command 1: Make the strongest pattern more visually obvious.

Command 2: Add a filter so users can explore the data.

Command 3: Use a standard metric threshold to decide whether the map passes.

Command 4: Make the map feel more neutral.

Command 5: Add a short explanation panel.

For each converted critique prompt, explain what kind of judgment it forces.

Choose the best converted prompt and run it against your map concept. Save the output and your response to it.

PROCEDURE

Part 5 — Put Metrics in Their Place ~20 min

Metrics can point toward trouble, but they do not decide what a map means. Use an LLM to create pressure, then push back.

Act as a quantitative QA reviewer. Identify 4 metrics or standards that someone might use to judge this map, such as contrast, label density, load time, touch target size, projection, aggregation threshold, or classification method. For each metric, explain:

- what the metric can reveal
- what it cannot reveal
- how blindly following it could produce a worse map
- what human judgment should decide instead

Reminder

The goal is not to reject metrics. The goal is to prevent a number from pretending to be the whole critique.

PROCEDURE

Part 6 — Write the Publishability Verdict ~20 min

Close the critique loop with a decision that someone else could audit.

Using my critique dossier, help me draft a publishability verdict with these sections:

1. Decision: publish, revise, withhold, or test with users first
2. Strongest evidence for the decision
3. Most important unresolved concern
4. One design change I accept
5. One suggested change I reject and why
6. What prompt, model response, or human judgment supports this decision
7. What would allow another person to reproduce my critique process

Keep the tone professional and accountable.

Core deliverable

Your dossier must include the map concept, prompts, LLM critique excerpts, drift ledger, metrics table, human decisions, and publishability verdict.

DELIVERABLE

Submission ~15 min

- Map concept under critique
- Technical function versus cartographic critique table
- Four-lens critique questions
- Design drift ledger
- Command-to-critique prompt conversion
- Metrics-as-signals table
- Publishability verdict
- A 300-500 word reflection on how critique changed what counted as evidence, authorship, or publishability