

Effective feedback

LTC resource developed in Fall 2018

The purpose of feedback is to reduce the gap between a student's current performance or understanding and a desired skill or content goal. Specific and clear assignment goals are an important part of making feedback effective because such goals focus students' attention and allow for more directed feedback. If an assignment has too many goals, or feedback tries to address too many topics, students may have a hard time learning from feedback because they may ignore some (very important) aspects of the assignment and feedback and focus on other less important aspects of the assignment and feedback.

What should feedback address?

In their article, "The Power of Feedback," Hattie and Timperley summarize what information feedback should provide students, in the form of three questions that students should be able to answer:

- Where am I going? -- clarity about goals
- How am I going? -- progress being made towards goals
- Where to next? -- what needs to be done in order to make better progress towards goals

Feedback can address several levels of performance: feedback on the task itself; feedback on the process (that provides strategies for approaches to tackling the task); and feedback on self-regulation (how to self-monitor and self-assess one's understanding or performance).

What is constructive feedback?

- Provides specific examples of strengths and actionable areas for improvement within the context of the goals for the assignment
- Focuses on attainable outcomes that can be achieved with the context of the course
- Offers useful and varied strategies for improvement
- Is timely, in order to be useful to student learning (Stevens & Levi 2005, pg 17). In a 10-week term, providing students feedback within one week of submission is desirable.

What is not constructive feedback?

- Is non-specific (e.g. "good work")
- Focuses on characteristics of the student rather than characteristics of how the student performed on aspects of the assignment
- Is unrelated to critical dimensions of the assignment goals (e.g. 70% of the feedback is about grammar for an assignment with the primary objective of encouraging students to find and use appropriate sources to support an argument)
- Is so delayed that it cannot be used for subsequent assignments. Asking students to submit assignments before providing feedback on earlier assignments undermines the learning process.

Is it more effective to frame feedback as evaluative or directive?

Research suggests that evaluative feedback -- past-oriented comments that focus on how the student performed -- is more likely to be remembered than directive feedback -- future-orientated comments that make suggestions for improving next time (Nash et al. 2018). Whether you use evaluative or directive feedback, consider how to encourage students to reflect on and use the feedback that they receive. One way to do this is to provide scaffolded assignments where time-bound feedback from the first step of an assignment must be incorporated in the second step of an assignment. For an example, see the example two-stage feedback process described in ["Reflections on Effective Use of Feedback"](#) by Carolina Kuepper-Tetzel.

How can an instructor help students make sense of feedback?

- Remind students that feedback is not a justification for a grade. Feedback is an opportunity for students to learn where they are relative to skill or content goals for the course.
- Encourage students to consider how to use feedback going forward.
- A rubric that describes the criteria for success helps students begin to identify on their own when and how they are successful.
- For students in A&I seminars, providing feedback with a grade sometime in the first three to four weeks of the term is important for helping students assess their learning and skill development as they transition to college-level work. Help these new students understand support resources and approaches for college-level work.

What are effective feedback strategies when working with students from traditionally underrepresented groups?

- A feedback strategy that is effective for students facing stereotype threat includes three parts (G.L. Cohen et al. 1999, Cohen & Steele 2002):
 - Critical feedback should be conveyed as a reflection of the instructor's high standards.
 - Students must be assured that they have the potential to reach the high standards.
 - Students must be provided substantive feedback (and resources) to reach the standards.Evidence suggests that "both high standards and personal assurance [of students' ability to reach them] are necessary to take the stereotype 'off the table' as an explanation for critical feedback." (Yeager et al. 2013, pg 806)
- Consider how to convey "Not Yet" feedback as opposed to "Not" feedback. Encourage a mindset of growth and improvement over time rather than providing a sense of fixed ability or final judgement (Verschelden 2017, pg 65).
- Be aware that cultural differences impact preferences and expectations for feedback. Try to be transparent about the nature and goals of feedback in the context of your classroom.

What are some ways to be more efficient about providing feedback?

- Provide feedback on one or two elements of an assignment rather than grading everything
- Provide collective feedback to the class as a whole, discussing aspects of the assignment that were areas of common difficulty.
- Use technology to provide immediate or adaptive feedback on some types of assignments.
- Consider developing rubrics for assignments that you will use regularly. Rubrics help students identify key dimensions of a task that will be evaluated. Rubrics can be designed to describe characteristics of exemplary, average, and developing performance in each of these dimensions, or if you do not want to provide tiered descriptions, you can describe only the criteria for exemplary performance so students know what they are aiming for. For faculty who want holistic appraisal of student work, rubrics can still be useful for providing feedback without needing to include point values for each rubric category. Here are some resources on rubrics:
 - *Introduction to Rubrics: An Assessment Tool to Save Grading Time, Convey Effective Feedback, and Promote Student Learning* by D. Stevens and A. Levi. Available in the LTC Library.
 - [Rubrics](#) from the Authentic Assessment Toolbox by Jon Muller
 - The [AAC&U VALUE rubrics](#) are designed for higher-level, programmatic assessment, but a number of them can be adapted and adopted for classroom use.

References:

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