

LTC resource for students: providing constructive feedback on courses

Carleton faculty members benefit from getting student perspectives on their courses and their teaching, and they pay attention to that feedback. However, the nature of your feedback impacts the usefulness and how it will be received by the professor. Keep the following in mind when writing comments on your midterm or end-of-term course evaluations:

1. **Be respectful.** Derogatory comments or criticisms based on personal appearance, demographic characteristics (e.g. gender, race, or age), etc. are not appropriate.
2. **Be specific and provide examples when commenting on the course activities or the actions of the instructor.** Speak based on your own experiences, not on behalf of your classmates. For example:

Instead of...	This is more helpful:
"We were really able to listen in class." (This leaves the reader wondering what the instructor did to allow this.)	"I appreciated that the PowerPoint presentations were posted on Moodle; that way I could follow the class discussion and not have to worry about not getting everything in my notes."

3. **Avoid personal or emotional comments, instead describe actual incidents.** For example:

Instead of...	This is more helpful:
"The professor doesn't care about students."	"I went to the professor's office hours once, and he wasn't there. Another time I tried to stop by the professor's office outside of office hours to ask for help, and he told me he didn't have time to talk."

4. **Describe how elements of the course affect you.** Differentiating specific aspects of an activity/course allows the instructor to gain a better understanding of the situation. For example:

Instead of...	This is more helpful:
"The exam was unfair."	"I found the questions on the exam fair, but I found the length of the exam unfair. I knew the material that was asked, but really struggled to finish the exam in time. I felt very stressed by the time pressure and may not have performed my best."

5. **Provide both positive and negative comments** in a constructive manner to help the instructor improve the course and their teaching. While comments regarding what needs to change may come more readily, it is just as important to remind the instructor about what went well so that can be kept the same.

6. **Consider areas of responsibility.** While the instructor clearly has control over many of the factors that influence the quality of a course, in many instances there are factors beyond the control of the faculty member that may impact the course (e.g. physical classroom space, scheduling, etc.). When framing your comments, think about who is in a position to change problem areas—or maintain successful practices. Make suggestions from the student perspective as to actions that the instructor could take to help improve the situation.
7. **Comments about the personal traits of the instructor often elicit strong emotions and should be made with sensitivity. Only make comments about behaviours that can be improved.** Also, describe the impact on your learning—this will help the instructor improve the learning experience. For example:

Instead of...	This is more helpful:
<p>"The professor was often sarcastic."</p> <p>(This does not tell the instructor what the impact was.)</p>	<p>"The professor was often sarcastic which made me not want to ask questions or participate in discussions."</p>

8. **Try to target your comments to the topic addressed when questions are specific.** When questions are more general in scope, thinking of the following categories may help you organize your thoughts:

Overall Course	Teaching Strategies	Outside of Classroom Communications
Organization & Structure	Assignments	Traits of the Instructor
Clarity & Difficulty	Your Own Interest or Motivation	Physical Environment