

Effective Feedback

Helping Students Grow

Purpose: Effective feedback is one of the most powerful tools instructors have to support learning, but it can be challenging to deliver feedback that motivates and guides students. How can you ensure your feedback is timely, meaningful, and leads to real improvement? The following strategies can help you provide feedback that students can understand, use, and appreciate.

Steps for Implementation

1. Be Timely

- a. Feedback is most helpful when students can still remember their reasoning and apply your suggestions to upcoming assignments. Aim to return feedback as soon as possible, especially on key assignments that will inform future work. We suggest returning the assignment within a week, or within two class sessions, unless it is a major work.
- b. Set and communicate turnaround expectations, and stick to them.
- c. Remember that timely and targeted feedback will be more valuable to your students than extensive feedback, and better for you as well.

2. Consider Rubrics

- a. Rubrics are excellent grading tools, especially when used in conjunction with short narrative feedback. Using rubrics helps students see exactly how their work will be evaluated, reduces confusion, and keeps your feedback focused and objective.
- b. They allow you to evaluate work quickly and effectively, using the criteria that you have established as important. This is helpful for you and extremely important for your students.

- c. They allow students to quickly understand their strengths and where to focus their efforts.
- d. When giving narrative feedback, you can point to specific parts of the rubric (“According to the rubric, a strong thesis is clearly stated and arguable. Your main idea is interesting try making it more precise.”)
- e. Share the rubric before students begin their assignment, and review it together if possible. This makes your assignment transparent and sets expectations before they begin. Consider allowing students to self-assess using the rubric before submission.

3. Be Specific and Actionable

- a. General comments like “Great job” or “Needs work” don’t show students what to do next. Instead, clearly highlight what they did well and where they can improve, using examples from their own work.
- b. Try: “Your analysis is strongest in paragraphs 2 and 3. Consider clarifying your thesis at the end of paragraph 1 for a stronger start.”

4. Balance Positive and Constructive Comments

- a. Students are more likely to act on feedback when they feel encouraged. Aim for a balance by starting with strengths, offering clear suggestions for improvement, and ending with encouragement or a specific next step.
- b. Example: “Your examples really bring your points to life. To make your argument even stronger, try connecting them more directly to your main idea. You are starting to do this on page four; now see if you can do it throughout.”

5. Encourage Reflection and Revision

- a. Feedback should prompt students to think and improve, not just check a box. Where possible, allow opportunities for revision. You might also offer feedback multiple times throughout a larger project (scaffolding it), and

ensure that your feedback points forward to what they should do in the next stage.

6. Connect Feedback to Learning Goals

- a. When your comments reference assignment goals or rubric criteria, students understand not just what to change, but why. They begin to see all the parts of the course working together.
- b. For example: “According to our rubric, a strong analysis includes considering multiple perspectives. In your next essay, try expanding on alternative viewpoints.”

7. Keep It Audience-Centered

Think of your students as you write:

- a. Too much feedback at once can overwhelm students. Focus on the most important areas typically 1-3 suggestions at a time—so students know where to devote their energy.
- b. Ensure that your feedback is clear and usable. Use straightforward language. If possible, offer audio or video comments, and make yourself available for any follow-up questions.

Instructor Planning Guide

1. Feedback Timeliness

When will I return feedback so students can use it on future work?

2. Use of Rubrics

Have I created and shared a rubric that explains how work will be assessed?

3. Specific, Actionable Feedback

Am I giving clear comments that show students what to improve and how?

4. Balanced Comments

Does my feedback highlight strengths as well as areas for improvement?

5. Opportunities for Revision and Reflection

Will students have a chance to revise or reflect based on my feedback?

6. Alignment with Learning Goals

Does my feedback connect to the goals or criteria of the assignment?

7. Student-Centered Approach

Is my feedback manageable, understandable, and useful for students?

Instructor Checklist

☐ Timely Feedback

I returned feedback promptly so students could use it on future assignments.

☐ Use of Rubrics

I provided a rubric in advance and referred to it when giving feedback.

☐ Specific and Actionable Comments

I gave clear, specific comments that helped students understand what to improve.

☐ Balanced Feedback

I balanced strengths and suggestions to keep feedback constructive and motivating.

☐ Reflection and Revision

I allowed opportunities for students to reflect on or revise their work based on feedback.

☐ Connection to Learning Goals

I connected my feedback to assignment goals or course outcomes.

☐ Student-Centered Communication

I made feedback clear, manageable, and usable for students.

Resource: [Frameworks for Feedback](#) (Harvard Center for Education Policy Research)