Informal Student Feedback
Enhancing Your Course Through Early Student Input

Purpose: Early, informal feedback lets you identify what's working for your students and what could be improved before midterms roll around. By intentionally inviting input within the first weeks of your course, you show students their voices matter, model a growth mindset, and increase engagement. Establishing a feedback loop strengthens your course and demonstrates responsiveness.

1. **Gather Feedback Early** (By Week 3)

   a. Why so soon? Students are still adapting to your teaching style, the course demands, and online tools. Asking for feedback around week 3 in a traditional semester (or after the first few meetings in a short course) gives you time to make meaningful adjustments.

2. **Choose a Method That Fits Your Teaching Format**

   a. **In a Synchronous Class**
   Dedicate 10-15 minutes of class time to an informal discussion. Invite students to share what's helping them learn and what challenges they're facing. Use small breakout groups or open the floor for volunteers.

   b. **In an Asynchronous or Large Class**
   Use an anonymous written survey; Google Forms or a similar tool works well. Let students know their responses will not be tied to their identity, and reassure them that honest feedback is valued.

3. **Structure Your Questions for Useful, Actionable Input**

   a. A simple three-part setup helps focus responses:

      i. What is working well for you in this class?
      ii. What is not working for you?
      iii. Any other suggestions, questions, or thoughts?

  b. Prompt students to give concrete examples. ("What about the homework format has been most helpful or confusing?")

4. **Close the Feedback Loop**

  a. Acknowledge Feedback
  In the next class session or module, summarize the main themes you heard. Demonstrate you are listening—even if you can't act on every suggestion.

  b. Integrate Ideas:
  Let students know what changes you'll make (or why some things will remain the same). This reinforces trust and makes students more likely to share feedback in the future.

   i. Sample Language: "Thank you for your thoughtful feedback. Many of you appreciated the weekly summaries, so I'll continue those. A few said the instructions on Assignment 2 were unclear; I've revised them and added an example for next time."

Instructor Planning Guide

1. **Timing**
When will I collect informal feedback early in the term?

2. **Method**
What feedback method fits my teaching format (e.g., live discussion or anonymous survey)?

3. **Question Design**
What simple, open-ended questions will help students share what's working and what's not?

4. **Communication**
How will I explain the purpose and confidentiality of the feedback to students?

5. **Feedback Analysis**
   How will I identify the main themes from student responses?

6. **Follow-Up**
   How will I share what I learned and what I plan to adjust (or keep the same)?

7. **Course Adjustments**
   What small, meaningful changes am I willing to make based on student input?

8. **Reflection**
   How will I evaluate and improve my informal feedback process for next time?

Instructor Checklist

☐ I have planned to gather feedback by Week 3 of the course.

☐ I have selected a method appropriate for my class format (e.g., discussion or anonymous form).

☐ I have designed simple, focused questions to elicit meaningful student input.

☐ I have explained to students why their feedback matters and assured confidentiality.

☐ I have reviewed and summarized the main themes in the feedback received.

☐ I have communicated to students what changes I will make—or why certain elements will remain the same.

☐ I have used student suggestions to inform course adjustments where appropriate.

☐ I have reflected on the effectiveness of the feedback process for future improvement.

☐ I have reviewed DCE guidelines on communication and student engagement.

Resource: [Setting Up Effective Feedback Loops: The Role Of Assessment In Course Transformation](#) (Harvard Office of the Provost for Advances in Learning)