A short guide to effective feedback

Giving high quality feedback plays an important part in supporting students’ learning. However, students often fail to engage with feedback because they find it unhelpful, they don’t know how to use it, or they simply don’t understand it. This short guide provides some hints and tips on giving effective feedback to your students.

Remember, there are a number of different types of feedback, all of which are valuable, including individual feedback, generic feedback, peer feedback and self-evaluation. As well as “formal” feedback, in many disciplines (for example those with clinical, lab or performance-based work and those where seminars are the norm) feedback is also available as direct verbal comments and we should encourage students to recognise and engage with this form of feedback too.

You should always consider using a variety of formats when providing feedback throughout your units/programmes.

Make sure they understand the assignment

• Make sure your students understand the assignment before they have to submit - assessment literacy is important in helping students to prepare for their assessments.
• Be clear about how any individual piece of work fits into the bigger portfolio of assessments in the programme.
• Give them the marking criteria in advance and make sure they understand the standards and skills you expect them to demonstrate in each particular assignment.

Make it dialogic

• Effective feedback is a dialogue between you and the student. You can do this by using open questions or by asking the student to specifically identify on a cover sheet what aspect of the work they want feedback on, what parts they think they did well in, what parts they struggled with, etc.
• You could ask the student to predict their mark (and explain why) when they submit their work for marking.
• Face-to-face feedback can be particularly effective as it allows the student to ask questions, so consider how you can incorporate this into some of your assessments.
• Consider giving the feedback shortly before you release the mark to encourage students to engage with the feedback, not just the awarded mark.

Make it timely

• We have a maximum turn round on providing feedback of three working weeks, but the sooner you can provide feedback after the student has completed the work the better. The student will gain more from feedback when the assignment is still fresh in their minds.
• Consider releasing a model answer immediately after the submission deadline, or some generic feedback after you’ve marked a few assignments and identified common strengths and weaknesses.
• You can speed up the feedback process by using feedback proformas with checklists to score some of the criteria you are expectations, e.g. structure of the work, clarity, factual content, etc.
• Consider allowing students to submit drafts of their work or essay plans. This allows them to get feedback that they can immediately use to improve their final submission.
• Make sure students are aware of how and when they will receive feedback on each piece of work.
Make it meaningful and constructive

- Use language and terminology that the student can understand. For example, students might not understand the phrase "lacks critical analysis" – explain what you mean.
- Match your comments to the marking criteria so the student can easily understand the mark they've been given.
- Offer praise where it is due but also honestly comment on the weaker aspects of the work, focusing on what the student needs to do to improve.
- Remember, receiving feedback can be an emotional experience so when you are criticizing a student's work, use your language carefully. Make your criticism less personal by using "your work" instead of "you".
- Signpost to support and resources where appropriate (e.g. your subject librarian for citation advice, the Study Skills Service, the Royal Literary Fund Fellows, Studiosity, etc)
- Ensure your students know what you expect of them for each piece of work and that your feedback allows them to develop for the next assignment or assessment, or skills they will use after university.
- Keep it concise and to the point. You can use bullet points to highlight three things that the student did well and three things to improve next time.
- If it's hand-written, make it legible!

Make it electronic

- Use electronic feedback on electronically submitted work e.g. through digital annotations, feedback forms or rubrics. The Digital Education Office can advise on tried and tested solutions for individual units and for adoption across your School or Faculty.
- Consider developing a bank of commonly used pieces of feedback that include more detailed explanations. For example, what do you mean by "poor structure" and what does "good structure" look like? You could create a glossary for students to explain your frequently used terms.
- Hyperlinks in your feedback can be used to point students towards further information.
- Typed feedback is great and can help with legibility, but consider other mediums, e.g. audio or audio-visual. Spoken feedback can be quicker, richer and more nuanced, and students often say it feels more personalised. Audio files are easy to record using the Re/Play desktop recorder and you can link to these recordings through Blackboard.
- Online tools can support different types of feedback including individual, group, peer feedback and self-evaluation.

Resources

**HEA DEFT:** [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/developing-engagement-feedback-toolkit-deft](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/developing-engagement-feedback-toolkit-deft) contains a feedback guide for students and a useful glossary of frequently used terms

**Additional help on electronic feedback and audio recording:** [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/digital-education/ideas/feedback.html](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/digital-education/ideas/feedback.html)

**Your School may already have a standard feedback proforma – but if not, you might wish to consult:** [https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/sites/teaching-learning/files/quickguide-proformas-final.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/sites/teaching-learning/files/quickguide-proformas-final.pdf)

**BILT references:** [https://bilt.online/browse-resources/#assessment](https://bilt.online/browse-resources/#assessment)