



Ensuring feedback that students receive on their work (from peers or teaching staff) is timely, meaningful and useful
(USE item 8)

“Knowing what you know and don’t know focuses learning. Students need appropriate feedback on performance to benefit from courses. When getting started, students need help in assessing existing knowledge and competence. In classes, students need frequent opportunities to perform and receive suggestions for improvement. At various points during college, and at the end, students need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how to assess themselves.”

Chickering, A & Gamson, Z. 1987, *Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education*, [viewed 25th March 2009](#)

If your students highlight this as an area of concern in their Unit of Study Evaluation you might try the following:

- **Ensure that your feedback is clear, specific and timely and motivates student to improve.** Conversely, the absence of prompt feedback reduces interest in learning. Interviews with students suggest that being given a grade without feedback is not necessarily perceived as prompt feedback! The challenge is to balance payoff for learners and degree of efficiency in terms of the academics time. Sharing amongst colleagues the approaches that provide both efficiency and learner payoff in the discipline can be very helpful
- **Explain when you are giving feedback**, as students often don’t understand what feedback is, or what form(s) it takes. We need to tell them when we are giving them feedback (*my thanks to Ron Day for this tip*). For example, identify in the unit of study outline how feedback will be provided (even including your consultation hours). When providing a summary of the results of an assessment task label that summary as “feedback”. Feedback needs to be recognised by students in all its various forms
- **Link feedback clearly to assessment criteria.** Students are then able to identify how they might further improve their learning
- **Ask students to individually and then in groups, apply the criteria related to an assessment task to a good and poorer example of a similar assessment answer** (academics might wish to make up the poorer answer yourself drawing on common errors made by their students)
- **Address three areas when giving feedback:** what students did well, what students need to improve on, and how to make this improvement
- When providing feedback, **avoid using vague words** such as “unclear”, “problem with referencing”, “grammar poor” (with no comment on content) or “this doesn’t make sense”
- **“Feedback should open doors, not close them”** Words such as “weak” or even “excellent” without an explanation as to what excellent means, tend to reduce the likelihood that the feedback will be understood or helpful. Even ticks are not necessarily helpful! Preferably write feedback in the positive rather than the negative for example, rather than “I don’t understand this passage” try “Are you saying that...?”



- **Where possible, give students the opportunity to revise their assignment** or to get feedback on a draft
- **Create peer feedback opportunities.** Consider whether students could provide feedback on drafts or early work on an assessment to each other using agreed upon criteria
- **Incorporate an early assessment task where possible** (that is, no later than week 5), which will provide students with feedback that will support their further learning in the unit
- **Ask students what form of feedback** they would find **most useful**. For example, some students prefer the “track changes” feature in Microsoft Word. The [Microsoft Office website has information](#) on how to use this feature.
- **Face to face feedback although time/personally demanding can be enormously valuable** to the student. This is particularly helpful for new students adjusting to the ways that knowledge is developed, communicated and revised in your discipline
- Use **student-teacher memos**. Ask students to attach a memo to you with their assignment describing their processes and concerns so that feedback can be directed at the students’ concerns
- **Self assessment by students** engages them with criteria to monitor their work against established criteria and provide their own feedback (cited from <http://www.netc.org/focus/strategies/prov.php>)
- **Summarise to the class as a whole, the common strengths and problems** noted in a particular assessment task and how these relate to overall unit learning outcomes
- **For large classes, you could develop a code for common feedback comments** using numbers, icons etc. This generic feedback can be posted on discussion boards and in class you could then discuss these areas one at a time
- **Producing a ten minute podcast** on what a student did well, and what they need to improve upon means that the student can revisit the feedback in their own time
- **Consider what forms of technology can assist you in the feedback process.** Technology can generate or provide feedback in a more timely manner, for example, online criterion-based feedback systems like ReView; auto-corrected feedback via Blackboard quizzes ([eLearning Support](#) can assist); automated feedback via spreadsheets; track changes to make comments on your work etc.
- **Work with the unit teaching team including tutors** to identify key areas of student difficulty and ways to ensure that these are explicitly addressed in class ([Kellie Morrison](#) can assist with this)
- **Provide feedback on many forms of activities** such as during class or online discussions or presentations, and encourage students to similarly provide constructive feedback on multiple forms of learning activities. As much as possible refer to students by name. Great tips for this can be found in [Learning Student Names \(Middendorf & Osborn\)](#).
- More useful tips at the [succinct papers on employing different teaching methods](#), co-developed by the Professional and Organisational Network in Higher Education (POD).

Finally limit feedback to what is manageable (this tip guide probably breaks this rule!)