

A few comments on giving students feedback on their work:

Students learn more effectively if they receive early, frequent, meaningful and rapid feedback. Formative feedback may come directly from the instructor, from assignments and assessments that have feedback built into them, or even from other students. Regardless of the source of the feedback, students can benefit from critical consideration provided by others. There are a variety of philosophies about feedback in the literature, but generally speaking there are three aspects to feedback that instructors should keep in mind 1) type of feedback; 2) timing of feedback; 3) amount of feedback.

Types of Feedback:

- a) Correction
An error has been made and needs to be corrected. Not to be confused with clarification.
- b) Observations, Questions, Explorations
An instructor can provide information for students by making observations about their work, asking a student to explain why he or she made a particular choice, and encouragement for a student who understands one concept to go on to explore another.
- c) Clarification
A student demonstrates understanding of part of a concept but needs help completing it.

Students need to have specific information in order to make changes. Nicole and Macfarlane-Dick (2006) define seven principles for writing feedback:

1. Helps clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, expected standards);;
2. Facilitates the development of self-assessment (reflection) in learning
3. Delivers high quality information to students about their learning;
4. Encourages teacher and peer dialogue around learning;
5. Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem;
6. Provides opportunities to close the gap between current and desired performance;
7. Provides information to teachers that can be used to help shape teaching.

Driscoll (2005) provides an excellent summary on feedback, "A single score on a project or essay assignment, for example, provides little information to the student. The student, in turn, is likely to react with increased anxiety because no way has been provided to learn from his or her mistakes. A better approach would be for the instructor to conduct separate analyses and assign multiple scores for different aspects of the project or essay (e.g., organization, theme, use of resources, grammar, etc.). In this way, students can gain confidence from what they have done well and attribute poor performance to specific problems that can be corrected." p. 337

Timing of Feedback

Feedback should be provided early and as soon as possible so that the learner is still mindful of the topic. This may seem obvious, but in the hectic reality of life, sometimes this fact gets ignored. Tests, papers, and other high stakes assignments should be returned with feedback in a timely manner so that the student still has time to act upon the information. Students who do not receive timely feedback can come to the mistaken conclusion that they were doing fine in a class only to find out near the end of a semester that they are failing; at that point there is little or nothing that can be done.

Amount of Feedback

The amount of feedback to give to a student is often a matter of judgment. Feedback should be enough to explain what should be done but not so much that the student no longer needs to inquire.

Formative feedback gives learners the opportunity to improve and accelerate learning by actively monitoring their own learning processes. Use it early and often!



Resources

Driscoll, Marcy P. *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*. 3rd edition. 2005. Pearson Education, Inc.

Nicol, David J. and Macfarlane-Dick, Debra. Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education*. Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2006, pp. 199-218.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. 2011. Providing Feedback. *Focus on Effectiveness*. Portland, Oregon. Retrieved on February 22, 2011 from <http://www.netc.org/focus/strategies/prov.php>

Weimer, Maryellen. Good Job! The Importance of Writing More Meaningful Comments on Student Papers. *Teaching and Learning*. Excerpted from Written Feedback: What's Most and Least Helpful, [The Teaching Professor](http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/good-job-how-to-write-more-meaningful-comments-on-student-papers/), February 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/teaching-and-learning/good-job-how-to-write-more-meaningful-comments-on-student-papers/> on February 22, 2011.