

# Effective instructor feedback

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

An introduction to instructor feedback, including examples.

## HOW DO I USE IT?

Before producing feedback to students about their performance, review the document for best practices and practical examples of the best type of feedback to give for different types of student work. For assistance, please [contact CET](http://cet.usc.edu/).

Instructor feedback to students about their performance is one of the most impactful instructional practices available, according to a wealth of research (for example, Hattie, 2009). As indicated by Woods (2015), feedback can be defined as a “mutual exchange of critical information, given in a timely manner, to promote learning and self-correction.” This definition stresses the formative nature of feedback as a tool for helping a student to improve their performance.

### Types of Feedback

Feedback can be formative or summative. Formative feedback gives the learner information that will help them to perform better in the future. Summative feedback identifies the level of mastery achieved by the learner, typically in the form of grades.

Feedback can be provided to the learner from their instructor, their peers, or from themself. Self-feedback is often guided by use of a rubric provided by an instructor. Peer feedback is also best guided by an evaluation tool, such as a rubric or guiding questions, after training by the instructor on using the tool. Otherwise, peers may not understand how to provide useful feedback.

Instructor feedback can be directed toward individual students or group audiences. For feedback comments that apply to the work of many students, group feedback to the entire class may be the most efficient manner of delivery, and can lead to productive conversations. Individual feedback commonly occurs in written, oral, or video comments to the learner from the instructor. In some cases, feedback comments can be built into assignments, such as automatic feedback messages built into online quizzes. Rubrics and reference documents, such as exam answer keys, can also be considered forms of feedback.

### Who needs feedback?

Both higher- and lower-performing students benefit from feedback (HBR Guide to Delivering Effective Feedback, 2016). How much encouragement to put in feedback changes with the users’ performance level. While lower-performing students (novices) are motivated by high proportions of encouragement, higher-performing (expert) students prefer learning what they’ve done wrong and how to correct it.

### Characteristics of effective feedback

* In written or in video form

Oral feedback is easy to forget and cannot be reviewed later.

* Timely

Delays between assignment submission and corresponding feedback reduces the impact of the feedback.

* Focused

Address two to five areas for improvement rather than overwhelming the student.

* Descriptive, specifies behaviors and examples

Example: “How could you improve the methods discussion?”

Better: “Which methods sections in the Smith article are not discussed in your paper?”

* Compares the work to criteria; doesn’t compare the work to other students

Example: “Most of the students in the class were able to identify many more relevant examples.”

Better: “Note that the assignment description specifies identifying five examples; you provide only three.”

* Focuses on the work, not the student

Example: “You are really good at explaining theory.”

Better: “The theory explanations are clear and correct.”

* Is positive and constructive

Example: “I don’t see the application here.”

Better: “It would help the reader to give one practical application of each.”

* Supports a growth mindset

Example: “The grammar in this paper is poor. Is this the best you can do?”

Better: “The grammar in this paper does not meet professional standards. I recommend visiting the Writing Center, where you can get assistance in improving this skill.”

### Types of feedback

There are 4 categories of feedback (Hattie and Timperley, 2007)

* Feedback about the task is about the correctness, completeness, quality, and depth of the work. This type of feedback contributes to learning about the task at hand but has limited value for future learning.
* Feedback about the processing of the task is about the learner’s approach to the task, the relationship between their approach and the quality of their work, and possible alternative strategies. This helps them learn how to learn.
* Feedback about self-regulation addresses the processes students use to monitor and control their own learning, such as how they locate new information or their processes for approaching tasks. This type of feedback can promote self-efficacy in students.
* Feedback about the learner as a person assigns attributes to the learner, such as “You’re great at this” or “This isn’t your strength.” This type of feedback is not recommended and can be counter-productive, as it can contribute to a fixed mindset (in contrast to a growth mindset.) It also does not provide the learner with information that can help with future learning or improved performance. Even this type of feedback is complimentary, students find this type of feedback ineffective, inappropriate, or sometimes offensive.Suggested feedback for each type of student work

Table Types of feedback

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| --- | --- |
| Feedback category | Type of student work |
| Work is incomplete | Work does not achieve success criteria | Work is complete and achieves success criteria |
| Task | What was done wellWhat else is needed to complete the work | What was done wellWhere errors were madeWhat errors were made | What was done well |
| Process | Where the missing work is describedHow the student can evaluate the completeness of their work before submission | Strategies that could improve the student’s performanceInformation student could use to improve performanceRelevant, previous assignments that could provide insightResources that could have been used to improve performance | Strategies used that were effectiveStrategies that could improve the student’s performanceResources for further exploration into the topic |
| Self-regulation | What can be done in the future to avoid missing requirementsQuestions the student could ask themself when evaluating the completeness of their work | How the student can evaluate the correctness of their work before submissionQuestions the student could ask themself when evaluating the correctness of their work | How the skills demonstrated could transfer to other types of work |

Feedback chart based on Gan, [The Effects of Prompts and Explicit Coaching on Peer Feedback Quality](https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/6630)