A Student's Guide to Feedback

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What is feedback?

"A dialogic process in which learners make sense of information from varied sources and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies" (Carless, 2015, p.192)

Feedback (adapted from Nicol and MacFarlane Dick, 2006) …

- Clarifies what good performance is
- Facilitates reflection and self-assessment in learning
- Delivers high-quality feedback information that helps learners self-correct
- Encourages teacher-learner/ peer dialogue
- Encourages positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem
- Provides opportunities to act on feedback
- Improves learning/ teaching

Feedback can be formal or informal, formative or summative, on-going or end-point, written/ verbal, and from a teacher, peer or self.

How do I best use and interpret feedback?

Feedback is NOT a product but a **process** and therefore requires **active participation** rather than passively receiving.

There are two main steps with making use of feedback. The first is 'managing' the feedback well and the second, taking appropriate action.

1. **Managing feedback well**
   A good place to start is to actually read your feedback – don't just look at your grade (though sometimes it is tempting)! Your feedback will give you guidance on how to improve your learning; your grades cannot provide this insight. Try to approach your feedback unemotionally - if you initially respond in an emotional manner, put it aside for a while and come back to it when you are ready to use it to enhance your learning. Make sure to pay attention to aspects that went well, and aspects for improvement. Be kind to both yourself **and** the 'giver' of the feedback! 😊

2. **Taking action**
   Make a plan of how you can take your feedback on board to improve your future learning/ performance. This may even extend to aspects that influenced you in the process producing your assessment: was anything distracting you, did you allow yourself enough time to complete it, did you get tired of your assignment before you managed to thoroughly check

it? If so, how can you anticipate similar such hurdles in the future and modify your behaviour accordingly in advance? Finally, if there is anything in your feedback you don't understand, ask for clarification.

A useful way of becoming more "feedback literate" is to engage in providing feedback. Having experience in being a 'giver' of feedback can help you better understand the thought process behind feedback provision, and improve your ability to interpret feedback in a more measured and informed way. This is just one of many advantages of peer feedback. Leading nicely on to…

How can I provide effective feedback to my peers?

When structuring your feedback, you may find one of the following simple guidance techniques a useful place to start. Note: **always refer to the assessment rubric** when identifying both successful aspects and areas for improvement.

a) Feedback "sandwich"

Start by feeding back what the student has done well, then identify an area for improvement. Finally, state another positive aspect.

b) Stop/start/continue

1. STOP – aspects a student should stop doing (criticism of current work)
2. START – aspects a student should start doing (advise for the future)
3. CONTINUE – aspects that were particularly good that a student should keep on repeating in concurrent assignments (praise)

After writing your feedback, use the list below as a 'tick-box' list as a form of review before sending/ submitting (adapted from Nicol, 2010: 512-513). You may also find it helpful in reviewing others' feedback in a constructive manner.

- ✓ **Understandable:** Is the feedback expressed in language that is clearly understandable?
- ✓ **Selective:** Does the feedback comment (in reasonable detail) on 2 or 3 aspects that the receiver is able to do something about?
- ✓ **Specific:** Does the feedback point to instances in the assessment that it applies to?
- ✓ **Timely:** Is the feedback provided in plenty of time for improvement(s) to be made?
- ✓ **Contextualised:** is the feedback written according to the assessment criteria and learning outcome(s)?
- ✓ **Non-judgemental:** Is the feedback presented in a caring tone?
- ✓ **Balanced:** Does the feedback point out the positive as well as areas in need of improvement?
- ✓ **Forward looking:** Does the feedback suggest how to improve subsequent assignments?
- ✓ **Transferable:** Does the feedback focus on skills and self-regulatory processes, not just knowledge content?
- ✓ **Personal:** where possible/ appropriate, does the feedback refer to what is known about the student and their previous work?