

Feedback: Do Students Benefit from Yours?

Feedback that is both affirming and corrective is necessary for people to learn. Defined as *information on the results of one's efforts*, feedback that is clear and specific and coming close in time to our performance motivates us to improve that performance. Conversely, the absence of prompt useful feedback reduces our interest in learning. When instructors provide students with prompt feedback followed by discussion of incorrect responses, they are using one of the *most powerful predictors of positive student outcomes*. Below are some helpful hints for faculty to consider about giving feedback to students.

- When providing feedback on tests, save 10 minutes after all tests have been collected to discuss responses to questions with the total class. This may be the teachable moment when students will best remember your test question, their incorrect answer, and your corrections. If you have multiple sections of the same course taking the same test later in the week, a discussion the following week will be the next best time.
- As you correct tests, make notes for class feedback, recording a balance of what students did well as a class and areas for improvement. When returning tests, you are then prepared to give both total-group and individual feedback. Depending upon the type of test, a coding system can make providing feedback less time consuming (e.g., +A = good argument, +I = good integration, ?E = I question your evidence). Greater frequency of feedback can be attained by scheduling 4 short exams versus 2 long ones. This has the advantage of allowing you to provide students with formative feedback on early exams to improve their performance on subsequent exams when similar thinking skills and format are required across all 4 exams.
- When returning tests, reports, and projects, showing the class a good model from last term (or current term with permission from the student) serves as specific feedback of what “hitting a bull’s eye” would look or sound like. Moreover, sharing a weak model you have developed as a non-exemplar is a feedback tool with high potential for student learning, where you can discuss the differences between surface errors in punctuation versus deep errors in organization and concept understanding.
- Few things are more disappointing to instructors than providing detailed feedback to students, only to have them ignore it. When turning back papers, provide each student with a sheet of colored paper to resubmit in a week, with answers to these questions: 1) What was my feedback to you in this paper? 2) What did you learn about the assignment from my feedback? 3) What did you learn about yourself from my feedback? No grade is recorded until this sheet comes back.
- Student receptivity to instructor feedback can be negative, regardless of its validity or positive intent. Keeping students in control of the process may reduce their anger, as well as assist their learning. For multiple-choice tests, allow students to write out an explanation of why their answer is a correct response. With essay tests, reports, or projects, allow students to write a paragraph explaining why their evaluation of their performance is different from yours. This paragraph can be discussed during office hours. Frame your comments objectively, discussing the weaknesses of the student’s paper, versus the weaknesses of the student personally, thus maintaining the student’s dignity and motivation to put forth effort in the future.
- Lastly, asking students to provide peer-to-peer feedback on tests, reports, and projects is a tempting time-saver, but this should only be done in draft stages and with your coaching as to what constitutes helpful feedback. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student educational records, therefore, allowing students to see the final grades of another student on tests, reports, or projects is a FERPA violation and should be avoided under all conditions.
