

## Ten ways to give better feedback

Research suggests that appropriate, constructive and assessment-based feedback is one of the most critical features of effective teaching and learning. Feedback supports students to know where and how to improve, and it can support their motivation to invest effort in making improvements.

However, not all feedback is created equal. Feedback is most effective when it is **user-friendly (specific and personalised), transparent, addressable, timely, ongoing, and content-rich**. It further needs to be clear, purposeful, and compatible with students' existing knowledge, while providing little threat to self-esteem.

**Here are 10 strategies you can try to improve the quality of feedback in your classroom.**

1. *Give more quality feedback by reducing the number of pieces of work you assess.* Spend more time on selected pieces of work to give thoughtful, constructive and appropriate feedback. To make time for this, teachers do not mark some pieces, or look at only a third of their students' books each week, or engage students in peer and self-assessment of some tasks.
2. *Automate as many classroom processes as you can in order to devote more of your thinking to feedback.* When teachers automate many other tasks in the classroom and enable students to take most of the responsibility for their learning and learning activity, they are able to devote more time and thought to giving sensitive, timely, content-rich feedback that is well-matched to the students' learning needs at that moment.
3. *Be descriptive and refrain from evaluation or advice.* Approach giving feedback by carefully observing and commenting on what has been observed, based on the learning intentions of the work or activity. For example, "The first few paragraphs kept my full attention, because the scene painted was vivid and interesting. But then the dialogue became hard to follow, and as a reader, I was confused about who was talking, so I became less engaged." Such feedback informs the student of their performance, without making value judgements, and offers direction for improvement, while leaving the responsibility to decide how to improve with the student.
4. *Focus feedback on questions that challenge students.* In topics where there are few right answers, try to use questions in your feedback that support students to tease out their assumptions or be critical about the quality of arguments.
5. *Take into account students' affective beliefs.* Students tend to interpret feedback according to their beliefs about their strengths and weaknesses which can sometimes distort the message the feedback was intended to convey. Students who have high levels of confidence in the accuracy of their response pay little attention to affirmative feedback (unless the response turns out to be incorrect, which focuses their attention on feedback). Similarly, students who expect their response to be wrong, and it turns out to be wrong, also largely ignore the accompanying feedback. Teachers need to plan their feedback to reinforce or challenge students' assumptions about themselves as learners. Teachers need to consider the ways and manner in which individuals interpret feedback so that feedback supports students in developing positive and valuable concepts of themselves and their learning.
6. *Enhance the impact of feedback on student motivation.* Students are more likely to increase effort when learning goals are clear, meaningful, and when their self-belief in their ability to succeed is high. Feedback that attributes success to effort rather than a student's ability to succeed tends to be more successful. This is because attributing success to one's ability suggests that effort is not required or is unlikely to alter students' ability to succeed.

- 7. Create an environment for learning which welcomes errors and corrective feedback.** Feedback is most effective in learning environments where students are comfortable in making mistakes and where errors are seen as leading to future learning. If students perceive personal risk to responding in class and receiving negative feedback, they are less likely to engage in learning, and are more likely to reject or ignore feedback. Show students the benefits of (self-generated, peer-generated and teacher-generated) feedback to their learning. Teach error-detection strategies to students so that students can provide themselves with self-generated feedback.
- 8. Give students ownership of their own learning.** When students have some autonomy and control, and feel accountable for their learning, they are often more receptive to seeking, accepting and using feedback information.
- 9. Consider cultural preferences.** As well as individual preferences, students' preferences for the type and delivery of feedback may differ according to their culture. Students from individualist cultures (e.g. Europe, USA, Pākehā NZ) prefer direct feedback that is individually focused, and are more likely to seek feedback. Students from collectivist cultures (e.g. Confucian-based Asia, South Pacific nations) prefer indirect and implicit feedback, focused at the group rather than the individual level, with no feedback directed to at the personal level. However, bear in mind that when feedback is given at the group level, students may find it difficult to differentiate which feedback messages are relevant to them.
- 10. Involve everyone in the class (including visitors and parents) in giving and receiving feedback:** Feedback does not always need to come from the teacher, or even from people! Widening the range of sources of feedback ensures students receive lots of timely feedback. However, the quality and accuracy of feedback is also important. Students can be taught the features of effective feedback, beyond immature criticisms and unhelpful praise, and simple proformas can be designed to elicit useful feedback from a range of peers and non-peers.