

How to Give Effective Feedback Activity

This activity was created from information found in Susan M. Brookhart's book *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students* pages 19-29. Information from the book is provided for context to be used to supplement teacher discussions about each type of feedback.

Choosing the content of your feedback involves choices about focus, comparison, function, and valence. Because any feedback message embodies choices about all of these things at once, we will look at examples that address all four factors together (p. 19).

Feedback about FOCUS

Hattie and Timperley (2007) distinguish four levels of feedback (p. 20-21):

- Feedback about the task
- Feedback about the processing of the task
- Feedback about self-regulation
- Feedback about the self as a person

There are nine cards below that can be used by groups of teachers to discuss the levels and content of feedback. Once groups have discussed their own cards they can then share the information with the whole group.

The last table can be used as a matching card sort. Teachers read the feedback and then try to match it with the types of feedback it represents.

After completing the card sort discuss how the choices about feedback content affect the message that is sent and therefore how the student will probably respond.

Student response is the criterion against which you can evaluate your own feedback. Your feedback is good if it gets the following results.

- Your students do learn – their work does improve.
- Your students become more motivated – they believe they can learn, they want to learn, and they take more control over their own learning.
- Your classroom becomes a place where feedback, including constructive criticism, is valued and viewed as productive.

FOCUS - Feedback about the TASK

- Feedback about the task includes information about errors – whether something is correct or incorrect.
- It includes information about the depth or quality of the work, often against criteria that are either explicit (for example, criteria from a scoring rubric) or implicit in the assignment (for example, a written assignment should be well written).
- It may include a need for more information (for example, “You should include more information about the First Continental Congress in this report”).
- It may include information about neatness or format.
- Feedback about the task has been found to be more powerful when it corrects misconceptions than when it alerts students to lack of information (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). If the student doesn't know something, further instruction is more powerful than feedback.
- May not transfer to other tasks because it is specific to the particular assignment.

FOCUS - Feedback about PROCESS

- Feedback about process gives students information about how they approached the task, information about the relationship between what they did and the quality of their performance, and information about possible alternative strategies that would also be useful.
- Some successful learners are able to translate feedback about the task into feedback about the process. That is, given *outcome feedback* (knowledge of results), they can generate their own *cognitive feedback* (linking characteristics of the task and their process with those results) (Butler & Winne, 1995).
- When teachers give feedback about the process, they are scaffolding this kind of transfer for all students helping them “learn how to learn”.

FOCUS - Feedback about SELF-REGULATION

- Self-regulation is the process students use to monitor and control their own learning and can lead to students seeking, accepting, and acting on feedback information – or not.
- Effective learners create internal routines that include figuring out when they need more information, or an assessment or suggestions, and strategies for getting this feedback.
- Less effective learners depend more on external factors, such as whether the teacher decides to give any feedback on this or that assignment, for their information.
- Students are more willing to expend effort in getting and dealing with feedback if they have confidence in themselves as learners, called self-efficacy, and confidence that the information will be useful and thus worth the effort. Therefore, feedback about self-regulation is effective to the degree that it enhances self-efficacy.

FOCUS - Feedback about the PERSON

- Feedback about the person (“Smart girl!”) is generally not a good idea.
- It does not contain information that can be used for further learning, so it’s not formative.
- It can contribute to students believing that intelligence is fixed which implies that achievement is something beyond the student’s control.
- Feedback about the processes students use to do their work fosters the belief that achievement is related to specific strategies, specific kinds of effort that are under the student’s control, and not to innate ability.

COMPARISON – Criterion-referenced Feedback

- Criterion-referencing is comparing student work to a learning target.
- It is the primary kind of comparison to use for good feedback. (“All your details support your thesis that sharks are misunderstood except this one. I don’t see what it has to do with sharks.”)
- Helps student decide what the next goal should be.
- Answers these types of questions that students need to have answered in order to learn: What does the target look like? How will the students know how close they get? How close did they, in fact, get on this assignment?

COMPARISON – Self-referenced Feedback

- Self-referenced feedback is helpful for describing the processes or methods students use. (“I see you checked your work this time. Your computations were better than last time too! See how well that works?”)
- It is also helpful for struggling students who need to understand they can make progress. (“Did you notice you have all the names capitalized this time? You had trouble with that last time.”)

COMPARISON – Norm-referenced Feedback

- Norm-referenced feedback is generally not recommended, because it doesn't contain information the student can use to improve.
- It compares a student's performance to the performance of other students.
- It creates winners and losers and plays into that fatalistic mind-set that says student ability, not strategic work, is what's important.
- Norm-referencing is so dangerous to the motivation of unsuccessful learners – or those who feel that way, whether they are or not – that it is not recommended according to the research.

FUNCTION – Descriptive Feedback vs. Judgmental Feedback

- Students filter what they hear through their own past experiences, good and bad and are less likely to pay attention to descriptive feedback if it is accompanied by judgments, such as a grade or an evaluative comment. They may even hear “judgment” when you intended description.
- Some unsuccessful learners have been so frustrated by their school experiences that they might see even an attempt to help them as just another declaration that they are “stupid.” For these learners, it helps to point out improvements over their own last performance, even if those improvements don't amount to success on the assignment. Then select one or two small, doable next steps for the student; after the next round of work, give feedback on the success with those steps, and so on.
- Give students lots of opportunity to practice and receive feedback without a grade being involved. If students attempt moderately challenging work, are exposed to feedback that they can see makes their work better, are allowed to practice until they improve, and then do a test or an assignment “for a grade,” most will learn that they benefit more than if everything is a grade.
- Make feedback observational. Describe what you see. How close is it to the learning target? What do you think would help?

VALENCE – Feedback should be POSITIVE vs NEGATIVE or JUDGEMENTAL

- Positive feedback describes how the strengths in a student’s work match the criteria for good work and how those strengths show what the student is learning. This is also known as achievement feedback as it affirms what the student has done well and why.
- Positive feedback points out where improvement is needed and provides suggestions for things the student can do about it. This is known as improvement feedback as it describes what more might be done and what strategies might lead to improvement of the work.
- Criticism, if descriptive and not judgmental, can be considered constructive.
- Negative feedback includes punishments, general criticisms, and so on.

Feedback Focus - Figure 2.6

Purpose:

- To describe specific qualities of the work in relation to the learning targets
- To make observations about students' learning processes and strategies that will help them figure out how to improve
- To foster student self-efficacy by drawing connections between students' work and their mindful, intentional efforts
- To avoid personal comments

Examples of Good Feedback Focus

- Making comments about the strengths and weaknesses of a performance
- Making comments about the work process you observed or recommendations about a work process or study strategy that would help improve the work
- Making comments that position the student as the one who chooses to do the work
- Avoiding personal comments

Examples of Bad Feedback Focus

- Making comments that bypass the student (e.g., "This is hard" instead of "You did a good job because...")
- Making criticisms without offering any insights into how to improve
- Making personal compliments or digs (e.g., "How could you do that?" or "You idiot!")

Kinds of Comparisons Used in Feedback - Figure 2.7

Purpose:

- Usually, to compare student work with established criteria
- Sometimes, to compare a student's work with his or her own past performance
- Rarely, to compare a student's work with the work of other students

Examples of Good Kinds of Comparisons

- Comparing work to student-generated rubrics
- Comparing student work to rubrics that have been shared ahead of time
- Encouraging a reluctant student who has improved, even though the work is not yet good

Examples of Bad Kinds of Comparisons

- Putting up wall charts that compare students with one another
- Giving feedback on each student's work according to different criteria or no criteria

Feedback Function - Figure 2.8

Purpose:

- To describe student work
- To avoid evaluating or “judging” student work in a way that would stop students from trying to improve

Examples of Good Feedback Function	Examples of Bad Feedback Function
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying for students the strengths and weaknesses in the work • Expressing what you observe in the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting a grade on work intended for practice or formative purposes • Telling students the work is “good” or “bad” • Giving rewards or punishments • Giving general praise or general criticism

Feedback Valence - Figure 2.9

Purpose:

- To use positive comments that describe what is well done
- To make suggestions about what could be done for improvement

Examples of Good Feedback Function	Examples of Bad Feedback Function
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being positive • Even when criticizing, being constructive • Making suggestions (not prescriptions or pronouncements) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finding fault • Describing what is wrong and offering no suggestions about what to do • Punishing or denigrating students for poor work

<p><i>Each paragraph should have one main idea, and that idea goes in the topic sentence.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus - Task • Comparison – Criterion-referenced • Function - Descriptive • Valence – Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback if the student needs this information about what paragraphs should look contain.</p>
<p><i>Your details strongly support your claim that we should recycle newspapers. That’s great. Where did you find all those facts?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process, self-regulation • Comparison – Criterion-referenced • Function - Descriptive • Valence – Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback. It confirms for the student that the work meets one of the targets (strong supporting details) and connects this success to student effort (the student did research to find out facts, and the teacher noticed).</p>
<p><i>This report probably wouldn’t convince a reader who didn’t already agree we should recycle. What else could you do to make a more convincing argument?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process • Comparison – Criterion-referenced • Function – Descriptive, naming weakness in terms of criteria and suggesting the student think about improvement strategies • Valence – Critical, but pointing forward <p>This is an example of good feedback for a student who the teacher believes already knows what to do (look up more information in more sources). Such a response makes the student the one to decide on the regulation. It would not be good feedback if the teacher truly did not think the student knew what was missing.</p>

<p><i>This report probably wouldn't convince a reader who didn't already agree we should recycle. I would want to know more about the effects on the environment and the cost of recycling.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process • Comparison – Criterion-referenced • Function – Descriptive, naming weakness in terms of criteria and suggesting improvement strategies • Valence – Constructive criticism <p>This is an example of good feedback for a student who the teacher believes does not know what is missing in his or her report. It suggests what the student could do to improve the report.</p>
<p><i>Your report was the shortest one in the class. You didn't put enough in it.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process, personal • Comparison – Norm-referenced • Function - Judgmental • Valence – Negative <p>This is an example of bad feedback. The teacher aims to communicate that the report would not convince a reader who did not agree with recycling. Saying it this way, however, implies that the student is competing with others (as opposed to aiming for a learning target) and that the reason the work is poor is that the student “did something bad.” The student ends up feeling judged and not motivated to improve.</p>
<p><i>This report is better than your last one. You've made it clear you think we should recycle newspapers. What would make it even better is more facts about what would happen if we did recycle – more about how many trees we would save, things like that.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process • Comparison – Self-referenced • Function - Descriptive • Valence – Positive, plus constructive criticism <p>This is an example of good feedback that uses self-referenced comparisons in conjunction with descriptive information about the task to show struggling students that their work is making a difference. Then, when the teacher suggests what they need to do next, they may be more likely to think they can do it. Notice too that the teacher makes one suggestion (and probable also made one last time: it's important to be clear about the main point). Giving feedback about small steps helps students who would be overwhelmed by having to improve in many areas at once.</p>

<p><i>Your report is the best one in the class! You can have a “free pass” for your homework tonight.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Personal (it says the report is great, but the attribution seems to be that this is a “good” student) • Comparison – Norm-referenced • Function - Judgmental • Valence – Positive <p>This is an example of bad feedback. It does not tell the student what is good about the report. It also rewards the student by changing an unrelated assignment.</p>
<p><i>I love the chart that starts with trees and ends up at the recycling plant (instead of back at more trees). It follows the relevant section of your report and illustrates the complete cycle so clearly! How did you come up with that idea?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus – Task, process, self-regulation • Comparison – Criterion-referenced • Function - Descriptive • Valence – Positive <p>This is an example of good feedback. It selects an unusual, positive feature of a good report, notices that this must have been an original idea, and asks the student to reflect on how he or she came up with the idea. Having the student name the strategy used will strengthen this student’s self-regulation abilities and probably increase self-efficacy.</p>
<p><i>Your report is late! What’s the matter with you?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus - Personal • Comparison – Criterion-referenced (implied-being on time_ • Function - Judgmental • Valence – Negative <p>This is an example of bad feedback. Of course there is a problem if work is late. However, put yourself in the student’s position. Would this comment really inspire you to finish your work and turn it in?</p>
<p><i>[Name], I don’t have your report. Can you tell me what happened?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus - Process • Comparison – Criterion-referenced (implied-being on time) • Function - Descriptive • Valence – Open at this point, soliciting information <p>This is better way to provide feedback that a report is late.</p>

