

FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT PROMOTES STUDENTS' LEARNING

It is widely recognized that feedback is an important part of the learning cycle, but both students and teachers frequently express disappointment and frustration in relation to the conduct of the feedback process. Students may complain that feedback on assessment is unhelpful or unclear, and sometimes even demoralizing. Additionally, students sometimes report that they are not given guidance as to how to use feedback to improve subsequent performance.

Even worse, students sometimes note that the feedback is provided too late to be of any use or relevance at all. For their part, lecturers frequently comment that students are not interested in feedback comments and are only concerned with the marks. Furthermore, lecturers express frustration that students do not incorporate feedback /advice into subsequent tasks.

How can you ensure that students use the feedback that you give them?

It is commonly reported that students do not read teacher feedback comments (Duncan, 2007). The literature suggests that a part of the problem is that teachers and students see feedback in isolation from other aspects of the teaching and learning process, and consider feedback to be primarily a teacher owned effort (Taras, 2003). Correspondingly, the literature suggests that the feedback process is most effective when both students and teachers are actively involved in the process.

While some students may be primarily focused on marks, there are a number of strategies that can be used to maximize students' engagement with the process.

- 1) Design assessment so that students can see the direct benefits of attending to feedback advice. This can be done by breaking assignments into stages and providing feedback which is important to the successful direction-finding of next stages.
- 2) Students can be required to document how they used feedback to move forward to the next stage of the exercise. This strategy has the additional benefits of encouraging students' **meta-cognition** and making them more active participants in the feedback-learning cycle. The workload for teachers can be reduced by the decrease of time needed

to give feedback on the final product and by incorporating peer feedback into some of the stages.

- 3) Encourage students' reflection on feedback comments to give a provisional grade, but invite students to talk about their work and potentially earn a higher grade. Some commentators suggest withholding the grade altogether until students have read the comments and indicated this in some way.
- 4) It is also possible that students do not pay attention to comments because they don't make sense to them or that they do not understand the purpose of the feedback process. This is emphasized when feedback is delivered solely by the teacher and is often associated with students as the marking of what is right and wrong. Careful preparation beforehand can help to inform students about the nature of feedback and its role in the learning process. Students need to be actively involved in understanding the goals and purposes of feedback.
- 5) Students will participate in the feedback process, when self and peer assessment is a required component of the assessment system.

Overall, the evidence suggests that when conversation around assessment and feedback is extended and the students are more active participants in the whole process, then feedback is likely to be most useful to students' learning. It is also probably helpful for both teachers and students to start using the phrase "feed-forward" as this encourages both teachers and students to focus on future learning.



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