



What students say:

“It is helpful when teaching staff explain how you can do better, how you can improve, with more specific information.”

Providing effective feedback to students

Giving effective feedback to students is central to their learning. However, there is often a mismatch between academic and student perceptions of what is helpful feedback. This document has been prepared to provide academics with an insight into student perceptions of feedback at the University of Melbourne and some principles and strategies for providing students effective feedback.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FEEDBACK THEY RECEIVE?

Student feedback is a key issue identified in many different student surveys, across different universities over a considerable period of time. Feedback scores are consistently rated lower than other areas of teaching and learning in a number of student surveys. This is something that applies across disciplines and levels of study at the institution. Students often point out that feedback is not always provided, is not detailed enough, does not tell them where they can improve, is received too late to be useful, and does not adequately explain why they have received certain results. Although our primary aim is to improve teaching and learning, rather than necessarily improving scores, the survey scores are indicating something important.

Twelve Principles of effective feedback

1. Identifies where students are doing well.
2. Identifies where students' areas of improvement are, and offers ideas and suggestions about how to approach these.
3. Is clearly related to future assessment tasks, and is designed to help students prepare for them.
4. Wherever possible, is formative and not summative.
5. Is explicit.
6. Is constructive, and treats student learning as a developmental rather than a deficit issue.
7. Is timely enough so that it can be used by students in preparing for future assessment and in engaging with the subject matter.
8. Is provided in sufficient amount of detail.
9. Is provided in contexts where students can ask questions about the feedback, provide it to each other, and discuss their interpretation of it with each other.
10. Is pitched at an appropriate level.
11. Is stated clearly and, if written, is legible.
12. Explains how and why students received the mark they did in assessment tasks.

What students say:

“More detailed and timely feedback. One line of feedback for a 3000 word essay is appalling; detailed feedback is an important part of the learning process.”

Does the University have a policy on providing feedback to students?

Yes, the University Policy on academic experience is: [Meeting Student Expectations Procedure \(MPF1059\)](#)
Item 3.1 states that: *Students can expect that the University will provide students with reasonable access to academic staff for individual consultation, feedback, support and guidance*

General feedback tips

1. Try the 'sandwich approach', where you give students a comment that identifies an area where they can improve 'sandwiched' between two positive comments that pick out where they have done well.
2. Try to develop opportunities for students to give feedback to each other in peer review tasks that are either assessed or not assessed. Students may not thank you for this, but getting feedback from their peers demonstrably improves students' learning outcomes, so may be in their best interests despite their perceptions.
3. Lectures or tutorials focusing on assessment criteria and marking practices have been shown to improve students' understanding of the feedback they receive; show students how a task is marked, so they can understand the meaning behind comments that are provided.
4. Make sure to find ways to provide students with feedback early in the semester, even if existing assessment arrangements make this difficult. This can include feedback to student responses in lectures and tutorials, or arranged activities that are explicitly related to assessment tasks in which students receive feedback.

TALQAC welcomes feedback on this note and any suggestions from academic staff about effective strategies they have used in their teaching. Please send comments and suggestions to Chair, TALQAC: Professor Marilys Guillemin; m.guillemin@unimelb.edu.au

Time saving feedback tips

1. Students often make the same mistakes, and do the same things right in their assessment. Summarise commonly used comments for your assessment tasks and discipline. These can be tweaked to provide a personalised touch. Developing several comments of one type to use can also be helpful, as it can ensure that students do not feel they have received a 'stock' response.
2. Investigate the appropriateness of e-tools (see the resources below) to your learning and teaching context. These are designed to minimise the time you spend on providing feedback, while still giving students helpful and constructive feedback.
3. Base some tutorial group activities around approaching an assessment task. Students can work together to identify how best to approach it, and you can then give feedback to several students at once on what they are doing right, and on where other approaches may be appropriate.
4. Provide short spaces in lectures or tutorials for 'model' examples of student approaches to assessment, and explain how and why they are appropriate or inappropriate.

Common misconceptions about feedback

1. Feedback is not just about comments in response to assessment. Feedback can, and should, be provided to students in all learning contexts.
2. Good feedback is not something that students will ignore, by and large. Students pay attention to, and achieve better learning outcomes, as a result of receiving timely feedback that is clearly related to future tasks.
3. Good feedback is intrinsically more than a statement of what is wrong or right with a particular piece of work. It provides students an insight into how to improve in areas where they are in need of development, and an understanding of how the positive aspects of their work might be transferable to different contexts.

Handy resources

The following document provides an in depth analysis of how to provide effective feedback: [Good Feedback Practices](#)

If you already use turnitin to mark student assignments, the features described here can speed up giving effective feedback to students: [Smarter Grading](#)

A handy guide to creating rubrics on the LMS: [Learning Management System User Guide: Rubrics](#)

This is an online tool designed for providing randomised assessment tasks to students in the STEM disciplines, and has the ability to provide constructive feedback to them on these: [Maplesoft](#)