

Providing Feedback that Helps

Feedback is essential to learning, or as Ken Blanchard puts it, “Feedback is the breakfast of champions.” The kind of feedback that really works has three important characteristics.

- **It’s timely.** When we wait too long to give feedback, neither we nor our students remember much about the original work. Giving prompt feedback is difficult, but these things may help:
 - Focus the feedback on just a few things that really matter.
 - Use a rubric.
 - Give the whole class feedback on common issues you noticed in a recent assignment and ask students to reflect on which comment is most relevant to their work.
 - Have students give each other feedback; using a rubric usually improves the quality of student feedback.
- **It’s specific.** Useful feedback points out specific strengths or weaknesses. Compare these two comments on a student’s literature review:
 - This first comment is specific enough to guide efforts at improvement: “The section on cognitive approaches is well organized around major themes and includes the important citations, but your treatment of behaviorist approaches just summarizes studies in insolation. Before you rewrite that section, ask yourself how studies could be grouped and what major themes unite each group.”
 - This more general comment would be much less helpful: “This lit review is rather spotty. It includes some but not all of the citations I expected to see. Also, sometimes I wondered what your central point was. Try revising this to be clearer and more complete. You might also add more on behaviorism.”
- **It’s goal-oriented.** The point of feedback is to prompt improvement.
 - Link comments to the goals of the assignment.
 - Make the comments when there is still time for students to make improvements.
 - Here’s an example: “The point of this journal is to connect your field experience with classroom readings. Your first two entries did that well, but the third entry just summarized what you did that week at the agency. As you write the next entries, reread each one and look for places where you make an explicit connection to class readings.”

Interested in exploring alternative ways to provide useful feedback to students? These resources are both available in the CTL library.

Angelo, T. A. & Cross, K. P. (1993). *Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers*. (2nd ed.) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barkley, E. F. & Major, C.H. (2016). *Learning assessment techniques: A handbook for college faculty*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.