

Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. As a writer, you must be able to receive feedback. However, it is important also to know how to give constructive feedback in dealing with other writers. Keeping that in mind, remember the following when giving feedback:

1. Feedback is not the same thing as criticism. At its best, feedback should be positive, negative, and neutral. It is not a chance to attack or get even with someone who criticized your paper. If you want your feedback to be well received, you need to point out what works in addition to what does not.
2. Feedback can, and sometimes should, take the form of a question. Anything that you have a question about can be used as feedback. You might ask the writer, “What did you mean when you wrote _____?” Another example could be “Where did this information come from?” This is especially useful if you think the writer forgot a citation.
3. Feedback should not be personal; it should be about the writing, not the writer. The purpose of giving feedback on writing is to improve the document in front of you and help the writer grow in his or her craft, not to tell the writer what he or she is doing wrong. In addition, feedback that is all negative often causes the writer to tune out the reviewer. Feedback that is all positive may keep the writer’s attention, but it also leads to the belief that there is no room to improve, which is not likely the case.
4. Feedback must be useful and free of bias. Personal taste has no place in giving feedback. It is important to recognize the difference between something well written that you do not like and something that is not written well. This is especially true in persuasive writing. As a reviewer, your opinion on the subject is irrelevant. What matters is if the writer does his or her job in citing examples and evidence in the presentation of his or her ideas.
5. Feedback must be clear and complete. Telling a writer something does or does not work without explaining why does the writer no good. Just as the writer’s background knowledge may cause the omission of important information, the reviewer’s can as well.
6. Be prepared to answer questions about feedback without taking it personally. Writing can be a very personal thing, and taking feedback on something personal can make the writer defensive. In addition, if the writer does not understand your feedback, asking for clarification can at least show that the writer is paying attention to it.
7. Feedback is not a mandate. In the end, you are not getting graded on the paper, the writer is. You can advise the writer in what you feel is the best way to help with his or her writing, but ultimately the writer has the final say on what goes into the paper and what does not. It does not mean that the writer doesn’t value your feedback, just that he or she doesn’t agree with it.