

No matter your skill as a writer, the ability to receive and use feedback is important. All writers, from students in Composition I to published authors, need feedback. Keeping that in mind, remember the following when receiving feedback:

1. Feedback is not the same thing as criticism. At its best, feedback should be positive, negative, and neutral. No writer is great at everything, and very few are awful at everything. If the feedback you receive is either all bad or all good, get a second opinion. This is especially true of those who only give good feedback. While those who only give negative feedback are at least pointing out where you can improve, those who only give positive feedback are allowing you to believe that you have no room for improvement.
2. Feedback should not be personal and should not be taken personally. It is an important part of the writing process. No writer is perfect, and even the best writers use editors. Novelists go through many drafts before a book is ever published. Scientists' work is peer-reviewed prior to publication. Those giving feedback are trying to point out either strengths or weaknesses for the purpose of helping you improve as a writer.
3. You do not have to agree with all feedback. When you turn in a paper, the person who gave you the feedback is not getting the grade, you are. It is ultimately you who will decide what will go into your paper and what will not. However, you should at least listen to it and evaluate the usefulness of all the feedback you get.
4. What may be obvious to you may not be to the reader. The reader does not share all of your background knowledge. Something may appear to be an A>B>C relationship to you, but the reader, who does not have the same knowledge base as you, may see it as A>C>E, wondering where B and D went. Telling someone they need to change the universal belt in their '95 Jeep for it to run better may be accurate, but if he or she does not know what a universal belt is or how to change it, then the feedback is less helpful.
5. It is okay to ask questions about feedback. Yes, feedback often needs feedback. If you do not understand what the reviewer is saying, you cannot use the feedback. Ask for clarification, examples, or alternative ideas. Asking the right questions can turn useless feedback into useful feedback. It also lets the person giving feedback know you are paying attention and will increase the likelihood of getting useful feedback again.
6. Feedback is useless if you ignore it. Feedback is a chance to improve, to grow, or to refine or build a skill set. Do not waste the opportunity. Even if you disagree with it, you at least have another perspective.