

How to Give Better Feedback

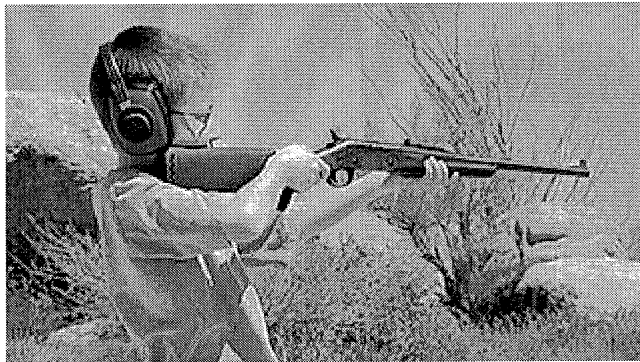
Giving useful feedback can improve learning and help enrich a student's experience. A mnemonic of five important elements of good feedback.



How to Give Better Feedback
Bang.

“You missed.”

Shooting practice with my grandpa didn't always provide the best arena to hone my aiming skills. The main reason? The feedback Grandpa gave, bless his heart, was less than helpful.



To help learners in any area—be it shooting a gun, writing a paper, or performing a dance—you need to give feedback that will help them reach their goals. Useful feedback is--

- Formative
- Actionable
- Clear
- Timely
- Supportive

Let's take a look at each characteristic.

Formative. Adjusting our performance depends not only on receiving feedback, but also on having opportunities to use that feedback. The key is allowing learners sufficient time and opportunity to use the feedback to improve their performance and to help them achieve their long-term goals before any summative assessment appears on the scene. Without a chance to improve performance before a final assessment, students tend to disregard feedback and are less likely to apply it elsewhere when the course is over.

Feedback often functions as course correction on a student's path. As you provide abundant feedback throughout the semester, keeping course learning goals in mind, students are best able to improve their own learning experience and to arrive successfully at the final destination.

Feedback shouldn't be limited to a grade against objectives recently taught; rather, useful feedback aligns with final performance standards students encounter early in a course. Returning to the shooting range metaphor, if Grandpa's commentary on my target shooting had been "C- on that shot," such feedback would have been as useless and uninspiring as "You missed."

Useful feedback contains concrete examples, at least much of the time. Remember that whatever feedback you share should be presented with long-term learning goals in mind and in a timely manner to allow learners a chance to improve performance.

Actionable. Actionable feedback will help answer the question, "What specifically should I do more or less of next time, based on this information?"

Too often feedback is given in haste and lacks concreteness and specificity. Comments such as "Good job!" or "This isn't quite right" or "B+" aren't helpful. Sometimes givers of feedback infer a situation based on their observations and simply offer a judgment, rather than present a sufficiently detailed description of the data. Suppose you've been invited to offer feedback to a colleague on his or her teaching. A comment such as "Many students were bored in class" is a judgment and tells your colleague little about how to improve class engagement. More useful and less debatable is this: "I noted ongoing inattentive behavior in 15 of 28 students once lecturing began. Specific behaviors included texting, accessing Facebook and email, and conversing and laughing in low tones. However, after the collaborative group discussion began, I saw such behavior in only one student."

The foregoing comment provides feedback the teacher can use to adapt his or her teaching style and address specific issues.

Clear. Feedback should make sense to the recipient. During the aforementioned target practice, sometimes Grandpa's feedback would come in the form of a grunt. And often his face held a perpetual frown. In the moment I expected feedback, I would interpret the grunt and frown as his response to unacceptable performance. While grading papers, performances, and other works, therefore, ensure that the message you send on all levels is perfectly clear. Pay attention not only to verbal or written feedback, but also to the tone of your voice and the expression on your face. If learners don't

understand your feedback, they won't know what they need to do in order to improve their performance.

Timely. To reach a destination, a pilot must undertake numerous and usually small course corrections. The sooner a correction is made, the better. The same principle applies as far as effective learning is concerned: The sooner feedback is given, the sooner it can be applied (assuming, of course, that you aren't hovering over students' shoulders, critiquing every word as it is written). Feedback is best given after the paper is submitted, the performance complete, the test taken, and so on. Hence, the best feedback is "timely," not necessarily "immediate."

Supportive. How you say something often matters as much as what you say. If you were to apply all the components of providing effective feedback but fail to be empathetic in your delivery, you likely would have as much success of your message getting through as you would shoving an extra-large pizza into a mail slot. When there is empathy, understanding, and love, students are more likely to willingly receive the feedback you offer to help them succeed.

Remember: When giving feedback, get the FACTS straight. The best feedback is **F**ormative, **A**ctionable, **C**lear, **T**imely, and **S**upportive.

Sources:

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Wiggins, G. (2012). Seven keys to effective feedback. *Educational Leadership*, 70 (1), 10-16. retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept12/vol70/num01/Seven-Keys-to-Effective-Feedback.aspx>

<http://ctl.byu.edu/tip/how-give-better-feedback>