



How might a student respond to the following teacher comments? (Talk to others at your table.)

- *Needs to be more concise.*
- *Be more specific.*
- *You haven't thought this through.*
- *A circle, arrow, or checkmark.*

Teaching Arts Lunch



Effective Feedback Strategies for Busy People

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Sample student responses to advice and evaluation without feedback (from Spandel and Stiggins, discussed in Bean):



Needs to be more concise.

- Confusing. I need to know what the teacher means more specifically.
- This is an obvious comment.
- I thought you wanted details and support.
- Define “concise.”
- Vague. Vague.



Be more specific.

- **You** be more specific.
- I tried and it didn't pay off.
- It's going to be too long then.
- I try, but I don't know every fact.



You haven't thought this through.

- That is a mean reply.
- That makes me madder than you can imagine!
- How do you know what I thought?

Comments are a genre with its own conventions and linguistic practices. We have to teach students how to interpret them.

We make well-intentioned comments in an effort to be helpful (“Be more specific”), but students don’t necessarily interpret our comments that way.

Not all comments are feedback.

Comments often take the forms of feedback, advice, and evaluation.



Evaluation

Describes how well the student met the goals for the assignment (often depersonalized):

Great job!

Weak paper.

Vague.

A-, 8.5/10, 85/100, check mark

You spent too much time describing (something) and not enough analyzing it.

Very impressive treatment of (something).

Excellent coverage of (this), but not (that) and (something else).



Advice

Provides guidance for next steps from a supportive instructor (often *you* statements):

Add more examples in the section on (some topic).

Read your paper aloud (to catch typos and ungrammatical sentences).

You will want to go into more depth in your next paper.

Do more analysis in the section on (something).

Be more specific.

Be more concise.

Go deeper.



Feedback

Consists of responses from a perceptive reader/instructor (often / statements):

- I am not convinced (here, at this point) that ...
- The story about (someone) helped me understand the problem, but I question whether it's a problem that many people face.
- (At this point,) I want to know more about ...
- I didn't understand how/why (something happened)
- After reading your section (or, your paper) on (topic), I realized/noticed/understood how ...
- I followed your argument easily in the first section of your paper, but I was confused about (something) when the discussion shifted in that direction.

The feedback process starts with the design of the assignment and the learning goals stated therein. The goals (1) guide the learning and (2) limit the scope of the feedback.


Limiting the scope of feedback to specific learning goals of the assignment means we don't comment on *everything all the time*.



Learning goals should be:

- clearly stated in accessible language
- specific (but not overly constricting)
- connected to previous and future learning

They often start with verbs like *identify*, *apply*, *describe*, *record*, *explain*, etc., and are often accompanied by a rubric that defines achievement at different levels.



Feedback on the learning goals should be (1) an ongoing process and (2) a conversation at least between the instructor and the student--if not among the instructor, the student, and her classmates--and *not* a monologue on the part of the instructor.



Tips for giving feedback

Stay focused on the learning goals.



Tips for giving feedback

Focus on the thinking the student has done in the paper.

Tips for giving feedback



Point out what the student has done well, the strengths (she may not know what they are). Be truthful and specific.

This positive feedback will mitigate criticism at other points in the work. (Negative emotions inhibit learning, so temper them with positive ones.)

Tips for giving feedback



Make feedback actionable and try not to jump to advice too quickly.

Advice without feedback is often not actionable (“write more clearly” and “observe correct grammar” are not actionable).

Tips for giving feedback



Leverage timing: Feedback does not necessarily have to be immediate, but it should be provided when it's most effective.

- How important is the feedback to getting students going? (Give it early.)
- How much do you want students to struggle on their own before providing feedback? (Give it mid-process.)

Technology facilitates timeliness.

Tips for giving feedback



For the final comment, create your own recipe for a Feedback Sandwich: start with something positive (feedback + assessment, mitigation), detail criticism (feedback, advice, assessment), end with encouragement (show respect for and faith in the writer).

Limit the number of problems.

Promoting the feedback conversation:

- Ask the student to provide her own feedback, even on the draft itself. (It will help you formulate yours.)
- Ask her to tell you what she would most like feedback on.
- Have her set personal learning goals and keep track of them from assignment to assignment or from stage to stage.



Suggestions for commenting on the final draft (no revision):

Research supports brief comments on writing that is not going to be revised. As a rule, comments on final drafts do not promote learning or improvement.

Consider using a rubric for final comments. Rubrics are efficient and allow you to show gradations of success.

Electronic shortcuts

- If you grade in Moodle and the work is submitted as a PDF, the online grading option allows you to save comments to a quicklist:

routine. My mother is already awake,

ready to go our separate ways. She

This is a comment I may reuse on
another paper.

all of purple and white blossoms from

children come running to me to say



Add to quicklist


Delete comment

Electronic shortcuts



- Alternatively, you can copy and paste pre-written comments or explanations into student work.
- Use rubrics and/or marking guides: helpful for giving feedback on things that can easily be communicated by circling or highlighting something on a rubric.

Electronic shortcuts

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- Use a color system for certain kinds of feedback.
 - Use Google Forms to keep feedback more specific and contained in response to prompts on a feedback form.

“In writing comments, I try to imagine the butterfly while critiquing the caterpillar.”

- John Bean

Resources



Books:

- John Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom.*
- John Bransford et al. (Eds.), *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School.*
- Jo Handelsman et al., *Scientific Teaching.*

Technology:

<https://www.gradescope.com>

<https://www.bestcollegesonline.com/blog/20-time-saving-grading-apps-th-at-teachers-love/>



Many thanks for your attention!

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Questions, comments, concerns?

Pedagogical Partners Program:

Come join us in an experiment! We are launching a reimagining of pedagogical partnerships for the Spring semester. Is there something you are thinking about doing differently in your class in the Spring? Might a student partner be helpful to you in your course? We are now accepting new ideas for student partnership — please reach out to us at sherrerdcenter@smith.edu.