



# GIVING EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK



## Giving Effective Feedback

Feedback is any response regarding a student's performance or behavior. It can be verbal, written or gestural. From in-class activities and assignments, to peer-reviewed manuscripts, feedback is essential for growth and learning.



Research suggests that appropriate, constructive and [assessment-based](#) feedback is one of the most critical features of effective teaching and learning. In a meta-analysis of over 800 studies, Hattie (2009) found feedback was the most important teacher practice in improving student learning. Feedback supports students to know where and how to improve, and it can support their motivation to invest effort in making improvements.

Studies of effective teaching and learning (Dinham, 2002, 2007a; 2007b) have shown that learners want to know where they stand in regards to their work. Providing answers to the following **four questions** on a regular basis will help provide quality student feedback.

What can the student do?

What can't the student do?

How does the student's work compare with that of others?

How can the student do better?



**Below are some suggestions to give effective feedback:**

**Do not just praise or criticize.** The most effective feedback does three things. First, it provides an appreciation for learners' efforts. Second, it welcomes errors as an opportunity for learning. Third, it is specific and actionable: it focuses on what is incorrect or could be improved, how it can be improved, and why. Generic praise is frequently ignored while punitive feedback is both ineffective and likely to foster a negative social climate.

**Provide individualized feedback.** Classrooms generally are full of diverse learners. Some learners typically need assurance, correction, and indications of which way is the right direction; while more advanced learners need their extended time and efforts recognized. Differences in ability levels can make group feedback less effective and less relevant to some learners.

**Provides a model or example.** Communicate with your students the purpose for an assessment and/or student feedback. Demonstrate to students what you are looking for by giving them an example of what an AA paper looks like. Provide a contrast of what a DD paper looks like. This is especially important at the upper learning levels.

**Given in a timely manner.** When student feedback is given immediately after showing proof of learning, the student responds and remembers the experience about what is being learned more positively. If we wait too long to give feedback, the student might not connect the feedback with the learning moment.

**Make learners active participants in the assessment process.** If possible, provide learners with a range and choice of varied feedback opportunities and offer opportunities for learners to offer feedback to their peers and also the strengths and weaknesses of their own learning performance.



One technique is to use the concept of a “feedback sandwich” to guide your feedback. It looks a little something like this:

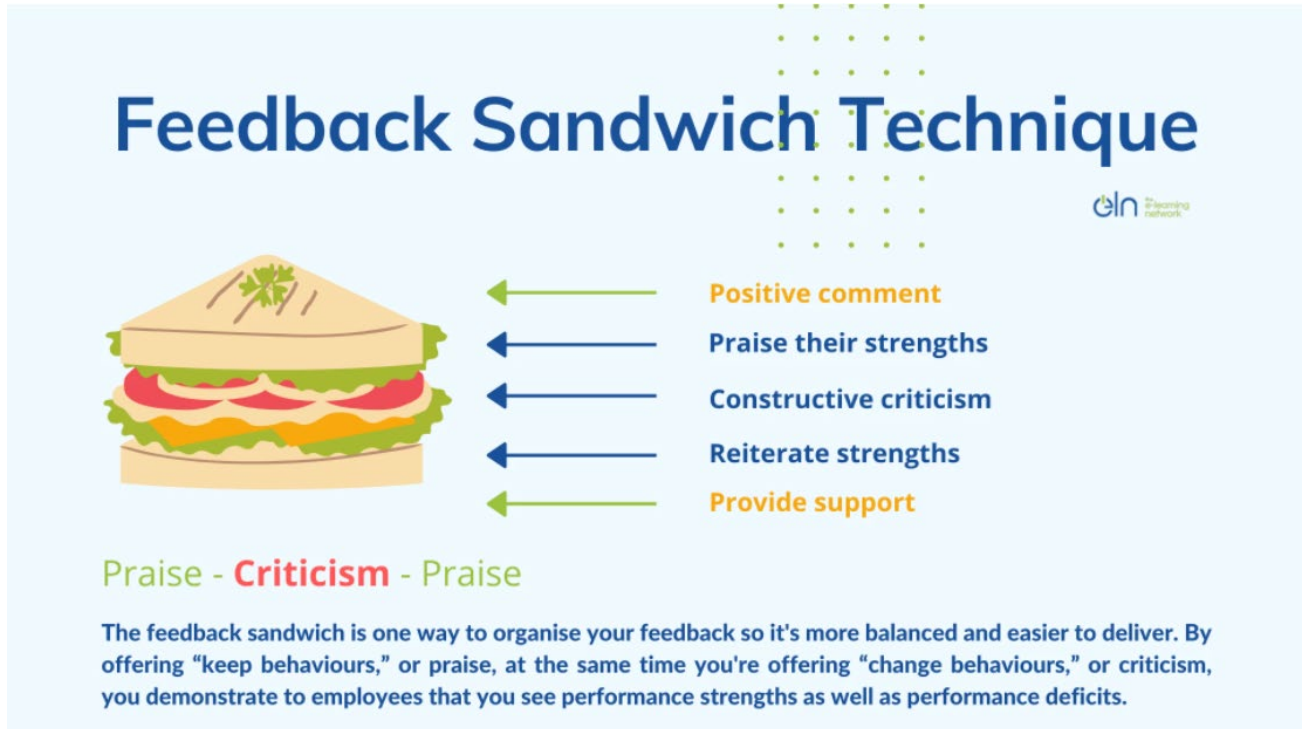


Image source: The E-learning Network

**Positive Comment:** It’s important to always start with positive comments on what you have just assessed. This isn’t to ‘soften the blow’ on your criticism, it’s the truth about their performance. Tell them what you liked about what you just saw. These positive comments should allow your learner to relax and understand that you aren’t there to test them but to help and support them.

**Praise Their Strengths:** Give your learners praise for their strengths. If you have assessed them before and they have improved on something you once criticized them for, you can praise them for their improvements. Don’t do this just for the sake of it – praise where praise is due. Praising them for something that isn’t legitimate will just devalue your comments.



**Constructive Criticism:** After you provide them with positive comments and praise, you can start providing the constructive criticism. These will be the things you weren't so happy with during the assessment that you feel the learner can improve on. It's important not to be too vague at this point. The more detailed the feedback, the more actionable it becomes. You should understand your learner's needs, capabilities and their situation as there are some things which won't work for them.

**Reiterate Strength:** Once you have discussed your learners' areas for improvement with them, you can remind them of their strengths. At this point, you should be motivating and reassuring them that you are confident that they can improve in their role.

**Provide Support:** Now is the time where you will offer support to your learners in their areas for improvement. Perhaps you think they need more training in a certain area. Tell them your thoughts on how they can improve and offer that training and support to them.

In any event, you are not trying to mask over the criticism, but instead, you are offering support and motivation. Even just by providing your learner with recommendations, they will have a strong call-to-action. You want the person to act on what you have shared, not procrastinate.

*"Effective feedback is a partnership; it requires actions by the student as well as the teacher" (McKeachie & Svinicki, 2013). It's not enough for the instructor to just give feedback; students need to be involved in the process from the beginning till the end. You might engage students in conversations about what makes feedback most useful, its purpose and value to learning, and stress the importance of implementation.*



## References

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- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Giving Learners Effective Feedback, University of Northeastern, Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning through Research. <https://bit.ly/3IfC2Ld>
- Importance of Providing Meaningful Student Feedback, University of South Carolina, Center for Teaching Excellence. <https://bit.ly/3pa3CBR>
- McKeachie, W., & Svinicki, M. (2013). *McKeachie's teaching tips*. Cengage Learning.
- Types of Feedback, The e-learning network. <https://www.eln.co.uk/blog/types-of-feedback>

## Further Reading and Resources

- [Fast and Efficient Ways to Provide Feedback, Edutopia](#)
- [How should students use feedback? Academic Skills, the University of Melbourne.](#)
- [The Secret to Giving Great Feedback TED Talk](#)
- [Giving Effective Feedback, University of Oxford, Center for Teaching and Learning](#)