Providing Meaningful Feedback

Why do students need feedback?

- To encourage them and build their confidence by letting them know what they're doing well.
- To support them in diagnosing their strengths and weaknesses.
- To keep them on track so they meet the course goals and unit objectives.
- To help them improve future performance. Feedback should be constructive and not subjective, specific and clear, and about something students can change for their future work.

When do I need to give feedback?

- Feedback should be as timely as possible. Don't wait until the end of the term to give feedback on discussion and assignments.
- It is vital that you provide feedback to students before their next assignment is due so that they have time to digest your feedback and integrate it into the next assignment.

How to provide feedback to online distance education students

- Individually (using the assignments tool or embedding comments in a document)
- To a group (using the discussion forums)

Tips for providing meaningful feedback

The following material has been adapted for use with Continuing Studies programs from *Compendium on feedback*. Retrieved from "More Downloads" http://phil-race.co.uk/downloads/

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Make feedback interesting! Students are much more likely to think carefully about your feedback if they find it stimulating to read and feel it is personal to them, and not just routine or mundane. It takes more time to make feedback interesting, but if it makes the difference between students making good use of it or not, it is time well spent.

Link feedback directly to the achievement of intended learning outcomes. The more you can constructively align (Biggs 2003)* assignments with course goals, module/unit objectives and the curriculum taught, the more students are likely to perceive them as authentic and worth bothering with. Giving students feedback specifically on the level of their achievement of course goals and module/unit objectives helps them to develop the habit of making better use of the course goals and objectives as targets, as they continue to study.

Provide most feedback at the beginning. Investigate how learning can be advanced in small steps using a 'scaffolding' approach, This means providing lots of support in the early stages which can then be progressively removed as students become more confident in their own abilities.

When possible, use feedback in rehearsal contexts. Consider providing opportunities for resubmissions of work as part of your approach to giving feedback. Students often feel they could do more work once they have seen some initial feedback and would like the chance to have another go. Particularly in the early stages of a course, consider offering them the chance to use formative feedback productively. Feedback often involves a change of orientation, not just the remediation of errors.

Get students giving feedback, not just receiving it. Think about ways of getting students to give each other formative feedback. The act of giving feedback often causes deeper thinking than just receiving feedback. Involve students in their own and each other's assessment. Reflection is not a luxury; it is the best means available to help them really get inside the criteria and understand the often hidden 'rules of the game' of Higher Education. In particular, asking students to review each other's draft material prior to submission can be really helpful for all students, but particularly those who lack confidence about what kinds of things are expected of them.

Ask students to send you a confidential email in which they respond selectively to your feedback on their assignments. This could for example include asking them to complete sentences such as:

- "the part of the feedback that puzzled me most was …"
- "the comment that rang most true for me was …"
- "I don't get what you mean when you say …"
- "I would welcome some advice on …"

Ask students to send you a confidential email, after they have received your feedback, focusing on their feelings. In particular, this might help you to understand what emotional impact your feedback is having on individual students. It can be useful to give them a menu of words and phrases to underline or highlight, perhaps including:

exhilarated	very pleased	miserable	shocked	surprised	encouraged
disappointed	helped	daunted	relieved	(other:)	

Ask students to tell you what they would like you to stop doing, start doing, and continue doing in relation to the feedback you give them. This is likely to help you understand which parts of your feedback are helpful to specific students, as well as giving them ownership of the aspects of feedback that they would like you to include next time.

*Biggs, J. (2003) *Teaching for Quality Learning at University: 2nd edition*. Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press, Maidenhead.