

## Feedback to students

### What is the pedagogical practice of giving feedback to students?

*Feedback* in the academic world corresponds to the delivery of information that allows the student to close the gap between his or her current performance and the expected performance.

Feedback has a significant impact on learning (Saphier et al, 2008). According to Black and William (1998), the performance of challenging tasks together with systematic feedback leads to greater student engagement and improved academic performance. The effectiveness of feedback depends on the timing, type, and way in which it is given. When feedback is frequent and in real time, students are able to redirect their efforts in a timely manner and even correct themselves.

Feedback can be classified according to its focus, which can be:

- ✓ The person: "I can tell you don't understand", "You're so smart".
- ✓ The assignment: "This paper needs more information about the contents of the Treaty of Versailles", "You did not use APA format to cite the bibliography".
- ✓ The processes used by the student to perform their work or activity: "This article will make more sense to a reader if you apply the strategies we discussed previously", "Would it help to do an essay before presenting?"
- ✓ Self-regulation: "Remember the fundamental elements to introduce an argumentative essay and check if they are present in your introduction", "How could we know if what you did is right, what should we look for?"

It has been shown that the least useful feedback is that which is person-centered and the most effective is that which seeks self-regulation (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).

Effective feedback:

- ✓ Must be free of value judgments about the person.
- ✓ Requires that the objectives of the class or activity have been explicitly communicated.
- ✓ Focuses on student performance in contrast to learning objectives.
- ✓ Explores student perceptions regarding his performance and capabilities.
- ✓ Begins by reinforcing the positive elements and then analyzing the missing or erroneous aspects.

✓ Ends by verifying that the student understands what is missing to reach the goal and the strategies to achieve it.

In the case of written feedback it is key to respect the student's work by not making incomprehensible or unnecessary marks and using legible handwriting. Written feedback should be precise and explicit so that when the student reads it he/she does not have to interpret it. Ideally, the *feedback* given should model the expected performance.

In the case of oral feedback, it is crucial that it takes place in a safe context. For this reason, it is essential to establish a culture in the classroom where mistakes are welcomed and valued.. In this way, students will not have major problems in recognizing that they do not know, that they do not understand, that they are wrong and that it is possible to improve. It contributes to the above that the verbal (words, tone of voice) and nonverbal (body posture) language used by the teacher transmits positive expectations and is perceived by the students as encouraging. More valuable than a speech is for the teacher to ask questions aimed at guiding students to identify for themselves whether or not they have met the established success criteria. Also to paraphrase in their own words the gaps and plans for improvement. With adequate support from the teacher, students are able to manage their mistakes to such an extent that they are able to self-reflect (Saphier et al, 2008). Examples of effective oral feedback are: "You can do it if you use the right strategy. To find it, let's see which approaches you have used so far and which ones you haven't tried yet." "You are very capable of doing good experiments when you understand the purpose of the experiments. There must be something in the instructions that confused you. Explain to me again what needs to be done so we can see what was unclear to you." (Saphier et al, 2008).

### What academic feedback is not

- Giving a material reward. A reward is a positive reinforcement devoid of information regarding the academic activity performed. Hattie and Timperley (2007) describe that material rewards decrease intrinsic motivation and threaten self-regulation.
- Praise or give advice. Although feedback acknowledges good work and hard work, the teacher's message should not be a grade, a homework or a recommendation. Yes, they should include information that allows the student to measure his/her gap, strengths and opportunities for improvement with respect to the expected performance.
- Making mistakes as a sign of weakness. Mistakes should be interpreted as a learning opportunity, not as a shortcoming. Thus, it will serve to identify gaps and confusions. This prevents students from avoiding mistakes, getting discouraged when they make them, and ending up abandoning the task. The teacher's task is to re-signify the error. For this reason, it does not matter what words are selected when giving feedback.
- Assessing aspects that are not essential to the learning objective being addressed at the time. An example of this is giving feedback to the student focusing on format, spelling, grammar, wording, etc. when the main objective of the task was to create a mood in a written text. This loss of focus disorients the student and makes it impossible to contrast the performance

achieved with the expected one. It is therefore essential that both teacher and student are clear about the performance criteria and that these are not modified in the process.

## Teaching strategies for academic feedback

- **Monitoring all stages:** before starting the assignment, the student should be clear about the objective and the academic standards to be achieved. Questions that help to monitor the above are: What should I achieve at the end of this task? What should my task look like when I finish it? During the execution and at the end of the task, the process and the product should be evaluated. Questions that help monitor the above are: Am I considering the essential content elements that should be present in the task? Did I respect the essential formatting elements of the task? Am I meeting the planned milestones?
- **Where am I going? How am I going? What is the next step?:** The teacher asks the students to answer, for example on *Post-its*, these three questions that are essential in feedback.
- **Strengths and Weaknesses:** the teacher displays the success criteria. Students highlight with one color those elements of their assignment that meet the criteria (their strengths) and with another color, those that still have room for improvement (weaknesses). Next to each highlighted element, students write a brief comment explaining why that part of the assignment is aligned with or deviates from the goal to be achieved.
- **Manageable information:** the teacher should deliver succinct, performance-focused information related to the task. The language used should be appropriate to the student's developmental level. Comprehension should be checked by asking the student to paraphrase the gap and actions to achieve the learning objective.
- **Highlight it:** many times students do not read the written feedback because it is too long, does not stand out, or is at the end of the assignment. To make sure they do, the teacher can add a post it in the first sheet of the assignment or an overall feedback written with an attractive marker.
- **Reflection on the feedback:** to assess whether students understood the feedback given, the teacher can ask them to write a brief reflection on the feedback and concrete actions for improvement.
- **Peer feedback:** students, monitored and supervised by the teacher, give feedback to a peer, establishing the strengths of their work and providing guidelines on what can be improved.

## References

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