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Feedback That Fuels Learning

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## Seven Characteristics (and Six Tools) That Support Meaningful Feedback

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It is commonly reported that students do not read or use teacher feedback (Duncan, 2007; Spiller, 2009). Yet, feedback is linked to the development of conscious competence, and is an integral part of engaging and effective learning. It helps students understand the concepts being learned, points out their mistakes, and gives them direction on how to improve or fill the gaps in their learning. Feedback has been found to be "more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behavior ... this relationship is consistent regardless of grade, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting" (Bellon, Bellon, & Blank, 1991).

Feedback can improve a student's confidence, self-awareness, and enthusiasm for learning. Over the years, I have implemented different types of feedback and completed qualitative research in which students' reflections on feedback were collected and analyzed to find out what students found useful in my feedback. The characteristics of effective feedback shared in this article come from research-based literature review and the qualitative research completed with teacher candidates over the years. The characteristics are ranked from most to least in terms of what would make students want to act on the feedback. In addition, this article shares technology that is useful when providing meaningful feedback.

**Table 1. Seven Characteristics of Effective Feedback**

Characteristics	Application in the Classroom	Source
1. Constructive.	Try to offer solutions, not just identify problems.  Constructive feedback focuses on the instruction rather than correction.	Hattie & Timperley, 2007
2. Specific	Feedback should point to a specific problem and include a specific example of the solution being recommended.	Spiller, 2009
3. Measurable	Include elements that allow students to know when the feedback has been addressed successfully.  Elements can include well-articulated outcomes within a given time frame. Always follow up with the student before the given time frame	Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Spiller, 2009

	lapses.	
4. Sensitive	Avoid negative language. Keep recommendations and comments on a positive note. Be mindful of feedback that focuses only on "praise, rewards, and punishment."	Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Poulos and Mahony, 2008
5. Balanced	Point out strengths as well as weaknesses.	Leibold & Schwarz, 2015
6. Applicable	Can the students apply the feedback to similar contexts or similar problems and still achieve the same results?  Students should not view feedback as isolated from other aspects of teaching and learning process.	Shute, 2008; Taras, 2003
7. Not grade focused	When a grade is given, to most students, it is the end of learning.  Effective feedback is not tied to a grade, however; it is tied to descriptors/indicators of high-quality or exemplary work. Use of and reference to rubrics is recommended when giving feedback.	Spiller, 2009; Taras, 2003

### Style and Language of Meaningful Feedback

In addition to these seven characteristics, there are other aspects of feedback that I found to be useful, such as *style* and *language* used when giving feedback. Spiller (2009) notes that *style* and *language* is a very important aspect of feedback and can determine whether students use feedback. Studies suggest that comments on students' task are frequently written in language that makes sense to the teacher but may not be accessible to the students. A study by Duncan (2009) found that most students reported teachers' comments on feedback as difficult to interpret; for instance, instructors used comments and phrases such as

Use a more academic style.

Deepen analysis of key issues.

Sharpen critique.

Identify and develop implications.

Link theory and practice (Duncan, 2007, pp. 273–274).

Having a clear understanding of the importance of *style* and *language* in writing feedback, I now write comments in simple and more descriptive language, which includes specific examples. In addition, I ask students to interpret and reflect on my comments in small groups. This allows for students to gain peer feedback. However, if the feedback was on high-stakes assignments, such as individual assessments, I have student-teacher conferences in which students explain what the feedback is asking them to do.

### Using Technology to Deliver Immediate, Elaborative Feedback

In addition to understanding the seven characteristics of effective feedback, it is important for teachers to recognize that today's student expects constant and immediate feedback (Radford, Connaway, Agosto, Cooper, Reuter & Zhou, 2007; Sweeney, 2006). If they don't receive feedback in this manner, their level of

frustration with completing tasks mounts. Teachers can use technology to support immediate, elaborative, and real-time feedback. It is important to clarify the meaning of elaborative feedback.

### ***Elaborative Feedback***

Elaborative feedback includes an explanation about why an answer is or an action was appropriate, effective, and productive or inappropriate, ineffective, and unproductive (Shute, 2008; Sim, Freiberg, White, Allard, Le Cornu & Carter, 2012). Technology that supports simulations, virtual tours, or field trips makes elaborative feedback more contextualized and applicable. Table 2 summarizes technology that supports delivery of instant, real-time, and elaborative feedback. The technology suggested offers the ability to deliver feedback in different modalities, such as text, images, audio and video. Technology for elaborative feedback can be integrated with technology for instant feedback. These tools include those that I use and those that are research-based.

**Table 2. Technology Tools that Support Instant and Elaborative Feedback**

<b>Tools for Instant Feedback</b>	<b>Description and Classroom Application</b>
<a href="#">Socrative.com</a>	Web-based platform that provides teacher-paced assessments and feedback, and student-paced assessments and feedback.
<a href="#">Screencast-O-Matic.com-</a>	Web-based platform that allows users to create videos and share screen recordings. The teacher can record comments in demonstrations provided for the student. This helps with targeting specific feedback.
<a href="#">Vocaroo</a>	Vocaroo allows users to share voice messages online. Teachers can record audio comments and attach to student feedback. This helps to clarify feedback that is difficult to grasp when delivered in text form. I use Vocaroo to deliver feedback (comments or responses) during discussion forums.
<a href="#">Google docs</a>	Allows users to collaborate on digital documents in real time. Teachers can use Google docs to offer real-time feedback in multiple modalities; text, video, graphics, or audio. Teachers should be encouraged to learn how to use most of the Google drive apps (such as Google forms, slides, spreadsheets, drawing, etc.) because they allow instant feedback.
<b>Tools for Elaborative Feedback</b>	<b>Description and Classroom Application</b>
<a href="#">Inspiration</a>	Allows for the teacher to develop feedback in concept maps in which elaboration and connection of concepts are delivered in real time. Allows for visual thinking, in which ideas, words, and concepts are associated with visual images.
<a href="#">Google docs</a>	See explanation in the Tools for Instant Feedback section.
Simulation software	Allows for the teacher to provide feedback in which modeling of a real phenomenon is possible; students are able to observe and model the concept on the computer.
Example:	

## PhET Interactive Simulations

This article will help novice and seasoned teachers to reflect on how they deliver feedback and how students use their feedback. In addition, they may use some of the tips and tools to improve delivery of feedback to students.

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