GIVING FEEDBACK in remote/online settings
IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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This material has been created to provide teachers at all levels with a resource to inform the design of aspects of their remote/ online teaching that call for providing feedback to students' work. While some of the insights and considerations included in this document are specific to remote/ online settings, most are more general and applicable to face-to-face learning contexts as well.

Please note that the considerations and options identified here are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather are offered as a starting point. Therefore, we invite you to "personalize" the analysis provided here by adding your own insights as well as eliminating options less relevant to you and/or substituting them with new ones you have identified as more valuable for your context. You can capture these changes by downloading and editing this Word file – as this is an open source document you are allowed to use and modify, provided you cite its original source.

The best way to get better at this practice, though, is to be aware of the decisions you make when implementing it and their implications. To help you keep track of and reflect on your instructional decisions when "Giving Feedback", on our webpage you can find a template to structure a Reflective Journal specific to this practice.

Introduction

Research on assessment suggests that learning is greatly enhanced when students receive timely and informative feedback on their work. Providing quality constructive feedback on student work is even more important when teaching remotely, as in this context it provides a unique opportunity for communication and connection between teacher and student. Deciding when, how - and even who - should provide feedback will be critical.

Potential benefits of *Giving Feedback* we want to maximize

- Feedback is critical to help students realize what they do and do not know, so they can focus their learning efforts where most needed.
- Hearing other people's point of view about your work can be very valuable.
- Receiving positive feedback can be very motivational, and thus increase student engagement.

Potential challenges (and how they may be reduced)

- Students may feel discouraged, and sometimes even offended, by negative feedback – even when well intended!
    - *Class norms and expectations about providing constructive feedback should be set in advance*
    - *Teacher and students should be sensitive to how they word and communicate their feedback*
    - *It may help to "sandwich" negative/constructive feedback in between two pieces of positive feedback*
    - *When possible, ask the learner first what s/he thinks went well or not, and then provide your additional feedback – it may make it easier to accept and process negative feedback*
- Students may find it challenging to give feedback to their peers, as they do not think they are "experts"
    - *Set clear expectations and class norms in advance*
    - *It will make a difference if students know that their feedback will help a classmate revise his/her product before a grade is given*
- Providing students with timely and individualized feedback can be very time consuming
    - *Being able to add comments on students' work submitted online that are immediately accessible will help*
    - *Sharing rubrics and/or models ahead of time may save teacher's time (and aggravation!)*
    - *Providing "summary/general" comments on common responses may also save teacher's time*

Other things to consider

- The value of the feedback depends on the nature of the assessment/task – the more open-ended and intrinsically meaningful the task is, the more students are likely to value the feedback received
- How you present the feedback is critical – it can make the different between having a student "shut off", or feel motivated to improve
- Showing models of past work is a powerful way of setting expectations – and thus providing feedback "before the fact"
- Receiving feedback timely increases its value greatly – although there is also value in "delayed/reflective" feedback

Key instructional decisions to be made – *along with possible options and their pros & cons*

WHEN:

Option:	Advantages	Limitations
Advanced (through rubrics & models)	• Sets expectations before the task is even started – and thus before the student may get emotionally invested in his/her product! • Making reference to common benchmarks will make it easier to provide feedback on student work	• Risk of limiting students' creativity if they feel they have to closely replicate the model
In-the-moment, while the activity is in progress	• Most effective, as it can empower the student to make adjustments leading to greater success	• Difficult for the teacher to identify the "right moment" and be ready to respond
First draft (with opportunity for revisions)	• Students can appreciate the value of feedback more when it is clear that it is intended to improve the product *before* a grade is given • Students will likely be more open to receiving the feedback and doing something with it	• Some students may put less effort in their "first draft" if they know it is not graded – and thus benefit less from feedback
Final product (no revisions allowed)	• Students may put more effort if they know a product is graded	• Students may ignore the feedback received if they know it is not going to affect their grade • Students may be more defensive in processing feedback if they have received a bad grade

WHO gives the feedback:

Option:	Advantages	Limitations
Teacher	• Students would expect their teacher to provide feedback and evaluation of their work • Teacher's knowledge about the subject will likely lead to the most pertinent and valuable feedback • Teacher can be more sensitive in choosing what kind of feedback to provide to each student, and how, so as to maximize learning and reduce defensiveness	• Students may not be as open to teacher's feedback, because of the teacher's evaluative role
Classmates	• Some students may be more open to receive feedback from their peers (who do not assign grades!)	• Some students may not trust their peers to be sufficiently knowledgeable and objective to provide valuable feedback • Students may not be sensitive about how they word feedback to their peers
"Real audience" (for authentic tasks)	• A real audience is likely to provide the most genuine feedback • Feedback from a real audience is likely to be perceived as most significant	• Audience may not be sensitive about how they give their feedback • Audience may not understand the level and capacity of the students involved when providing their feedback

Level of PRIVACY:

Option:	Advantages	Limitations
Public & individual	• Other students may learn from the feedback	• Students are more likely feel defensive or embarrassed by negative feedback
Public-general	• Other students may learn from the feedback • Students may feel less threatened if their shortcomings are not personally identified	• Some students may still not feel "safe" • Students will not benefit from individualized feedback
Private (shared only with the student)	• Some students may feel "safer" and thus more open to receiving constructive criticisms • Each student will receive individualized feedback	• Other students will not benefit from the feedback
Impersonal (as provided by rubrics and models, or critiques of work from a different class)	• There would be no emotion associated to the criticisms, so no defensiveness	• Students will not benefit from receiving individualized feedback on their own work

GRADING:

Option:	Advantages	Limitations
No grade	• Students will likely feel more willing to acknowledge mistakes and shortcomings in their work	• Some students may not put the needed effort in the work if they perceive that "it doesn't count" • Some students may not feel it worth it to pay much attention to the feedback received
Effort grade only	• Students will likely feel more willing to acknowledge mistakes and shortcomings in their work • Students will have an incentive to put effort in the task	• Some students may still not put in their best effort, and thus gain less benefits from feedback
Grade based on quality – on final revision only	• Students will have greater incentive to pay attention to feedback received on their drafts and put it to use • Students will likely feel more willing to acknowledge mistakes and shortcomings in their work	• Some students may not put the needed effort in their first draft, and thus get less benefits from feedback
Grade based on quality – no revisions allowed	• Students will have an incentive to do their best job	• Students may not be as open to negative feedback • Students will not have an incentive to pay much attention to the feedback

Useful online tools

- **Learning Management Systems (LMS)**: Any Learning Management Systems (such as Schoology, Google Classrooms, Canvas, Blackboard) has built-in functions that:
  - allow students to submit an electronic copy of their work that it is accessible just to the *instructor*, and to which the instructor could leave *private* comments;
  - allow students to post their work publicly to the rest of the class (usually using the discussion board feature), so they can receive feedback from their classmates as well as the teacher in the form of *public* comments;
  - most LMSs also include "grade books" that make it easy to decide what assignments gets graded and how, and to record those grades in ways that are easy to access.

- **"Sharing" apps**: Even if your institution has not invested in a Learning Management System, there are stand-alone apps (such as *Padlet* and *Flipgrid*) that allow students to post their work so that it is accessible to other students, as well as the instructor, for feedback in the form *public* comments. However, if the instructor wants to provide feedback to be shared only with the student who did the work, other online tools will need to be considered to (including email).

- **"Editable" text software:** Whenever student work involves written text, being able to embed edits and comments in the text itself is a very powerful form of feedback – from both *teacher* and *peers*. Common examples are using the "track-changes" feature of Word, or the capabilities built in Google docs.

- **Voice recording tools:** Sometimes leaving an oral comment on students' work may feel more personal and nuanced. Today's there are a number of digital voice recording tools (like *VoiceThred)* that can be used to play this function – often in combination with compatible "sharing" apps or LMSs.

- **Platforms allowing for synchronous sessions:** Platforms like *Zoom* or *Google Meet* allow students to share their work and get feedback *in-the-moment* from both instructor and classmates. Whenever the platform allows for break-out rooms, giving feedback could also occur within a smaller group (thus providing a higher level of privacy).

Options worth considering
*(S=synchronous session or F2F; A=asynchronous online or regular homework)***:**

Option:	*Considerations*	*A*	*S*	*Useful online tools*
A. *Teacher's in-the-moment feedback during a class activity*	• Most immediate and potentially helpful • Other students may benefit from it • May put the student in question "on the spot"		X	
B. *Teacher's general comments on homework*	• Allows the teacher to provide feedback that may benefit everyone, without making any individual student feel at a disadvantage • Will not address student-specific issues		X	• Assessment tools providing summaries
C. *Teacher's individual written feedback on student work*	• Will provide the most individualized feedback, in a way that can be revisited • It will be sufficiently private • Student will connect more directly with the teacher • Other students will not benefit from the feedback	X		• Track changes/ Google docs • Comment features • Voice Thread
D. *Other students' feedback on first draft, before a grade is assigned*	• It will provide greater incentive for the other students to do a careful review and provide valuable feedback • It will provide greater incentive for the "author" to pay attention to the feedback received and use it to improve the work • Other students' feedback may not always point in the right direction!	X	*	• Track changes/ Google docs • Comment features • Voice Thread

E. *Classmates' comments on online discussions*	• It will validate students' work without being perceived as an evaluation • Unlikely to provide negative feedback	X		• Option to leave comments (available in all discussion boards, Padlet, etc.)

Key tips

1. Create first a "safe learning environment," with clear norms and expectations regarding feedback
2. Be sensitive about how negative feedback is worded and communicated
3. Set aside time in your schedule to provide timely feedback
4. Whenever possible, assign grades **after** the student has had the chance to make revisions in response to the feedback received
5. Provide rubrics and models of past work as a form of "advanced feedback"