7STEPS
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

7 Steps to:
Giving effective feedback , 'feed-in' and 'feed-forward

Overview

'Students must have routine access to the criteria and standards for the task they need to master; they must have feedback in their attempts to master those tasks; and they must have opportunities to use the feedback to revise work and resubmit it for evaluation against the standard' (Wiggins,1998 p.64)

Assessment is a key driver for students (Biggs and Tang, 2007), and as such, it provides a valuable learning opportunity. By delivering relevant and timely feedback, staff can support students' learning, whilst the students have the recent assignment or exam 'in their head' (Race, 2011). The value of providing meaningful, good quality written and audio feedback cannot be understated. It can help students achieve the learning outcomes and develop as learners (Waterfield & West, 2006).

Research at Plymouth University suggests that, if done well, feedback can raise self-esteem, encourage dialogue, clarify goals and standards, and empower students to improve their own learning (Dawson, Magne and Sentito, 2009a).

However, marking can be very time consuming and the quality of feedback can be problematic as staff student ratios deteriorate (Barker, 2011). This 7 Steps guide aims to offer practical hints and tips for giving high quality feedback without unduly increasing time spent on this task.

Prospective students are increasingly comparing institutions via data such as the Key Information Set (KIS) and the National Student Survey (NSS). There is a need therefore to achieve high scores and in order to do this we have to engage students in a far more effective feedback dialogue.

1. Create dialogue as an integral part of your programme

Laurillard (2002) argues that for learning to be effective there needs to be dialogue between the tutor and the student. This dialogue enables students to engage actively in their learning (rather than being passive recipients of knowledge) and helps the tutor to find out how the students are progressing. The dialogue creates a feedback loop and enables the academic to respond to the needs, pace and interests of their student group.

Practical tips: • Encourage active engagement in learning and assessment wherever possible – for example ask students to predict the outcome of a scenario rather than telling them • Use an audience response system (ARS) that enables students to vote on multiple choice answers, then discuss their responses (contact TEL@plymouth.ac.uk for support) • Get the students to give peer feedback on excerpts of one another's work

2. Heed the power of language

'Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement but this impact can be either positive or negative' (Hattie and Timperley, 2007:81). Feedback must include comment on weaker aspects of student work, however it should be offered sensitively. The inclusion of praise will motivate and empower students to build on their existing strengths while working to improve the weaker areas in their work.

Practical tips: • Be honest but include praise where it is due • Make criticism less personal by using, 'your work' rather than 'you'. • Explain terms such as 'lack of analysis', rather than assuming that there is common understanding • Wherever possible, phrase comments in such a way that they are applicable to both the present example and transferable to other work • Give examples rather than revising students' work • Offer practical tips for resolving issues • Be firm, clear and encouraging • Remember you are addressing a real person, not a number

3. Use 'feed-in' in terms of assignment briefs

It is essential that students fully understand the assignment brief and the assessment criteria to help them to be successful (Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006). The information that you give students about their impending assignments is what we call 'feed-in'. Make sure that your assignment or exam brief gives the correct information in clear 'student friendly' language, and include the marking criteria. Using some of your class time to discuss the assignment, and answer questions, will lessen the need for individual explanations.

Practical tips: • Use feedback you have given in previous years to inform the assignment brief - address any key issues which arose and provide clarification where necessary • Get students to mark examples and discuss their findings.

References

Barker T. (2011) An Automated Individual Feedback and Marking System: An Empirical Study. Available [online] http://issuu.com/academic-conferences.org/docs/ejel-volume9-issue1-article163 (accessed 21.11.11)

Biggs, J., Tang, C. (2007) *Teaching for quality learning at university*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Brown, S. (2007) 'Feedback and Feed-Forward', Centre for Bioscience Bulletin, 22 (Autumn 2007)

Dawson, J., Magne, P., Sentito, E. (2009a) Effective feedback: the importance of raising staff awareness of the student perspective. Pedagogical education: contemporary problems, modern concepts, theories and practices conference: St Petersburg, Russia

Hattie, J., Timperley, H. (2007) 'The power of feedback', *Review of educational research*, 77 (1), pp. 81-112.

Ice, P., Curtis, R., Wells, J., & Phillips, P. (2007). Using asynchronous audio feedback to enhance teaching presence and student sense of community. Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 11(2), 3-25.

Laurillard, D. (2002) *Rethinking university teaching*. 2nd edn. London: Routledge

Nicol, D. and Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative Assessment and Self-Regulated Learning: A Model of Secen Principles of Good Feedback Practice. Studies in Higher Education, 31(2), pp199-218.

Pimentel Botas, P. C. (2004) *Students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical styles in Higher Education*. Educate. 4 pp16-30. Available [online] http://www.educatejournal.org/index.php?journal=educate&page=article&op=viewFile&path%5B%5D=77&path%5B%5D=74 (accessed 10.10.11)

Race, P., Pickford, R. (2007) Making *Teaching Work* London: Sage

Race, P (2011) Making learning happen (Master class) Plymouth University

Vardi I. (2009) 'The Relationship Between Feedback and Change in Tertiary Student Writing in the Disciplines'. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 20, (3), pp350-361

Waterfield, J., West, B. (2006) Inclusive *Assessment in Higher Education: A Resource for Change*. Plymouth. University of Plymouth. Staff-Student Partnership for Assessment Change and Evaluation (SPACE) Available [online] http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=10494 (Date accessed 2.8.11)

Wiggins, G. (1998). *Educative Assessment: Designing Assessments to Inform and Improve Student Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

4. Provide 'feed-forward' (formative feedback)

It is particularly important to give formative feedback or 'feedforward' (Brown, 2007) during the assignment process, allowing students to digest it and make relevant updates to their work before final submission. Feed-forward focuses on improving the current assignment, but also on developing skills for subsequent assessments. It can lead to change, engage students in the learning process and improve grades (Vardi, 2009) and if done well, it is, 'arguably the most powerful enhancement to learning' (Biggs and Tang, 2007:97).

Practical tips: • All feedback should be Honest, Analytical, Constructive and Empowering (HACE) • Train your students in the HACE principle and offer group tutorials or surgery sessions where students can give and receive verbal formative feedback • Provide a checklist for the students and get them to check their draft, identify the bits they need to work on, suggest improvements (Race, 2011) • Pick up on common mistakes and give general feed-forward in a class session • Avoid providing very prescriptive feedback or making corrections, these can increase dependence, reduce student ownership and restrict learning (Vardi, 2009).

5. Give meaningful and timely 'feedback' (summative)

Students value feedback more when it is timely and prompt i.e. received while the assessment they have just completed is still fresh in their minds, and before the next assessment is due (Race 2007, Dawson, Magne and Sentito, 2009b). Follow the HACE principle.

Practical tips: • Where possible give instant feedback e.g. release a model answer with fully annotated markers' comments and go through this in class (Race, 2011)   • Schedule a marking period into your timetable to enable fast turn-around • Ensure that your comments relate to the marking criteria and match the grade that you give • Build a 'feedback bank' (see point 6).

6. Think creatively about feedback processes and media

Research suggests that students respond well to alternative methods of providing feedback such as audio feedback (Ice et al, 2007). Spoken feedback can be quicker, much richer and personalised, with intonation and voice used positively to encourage learning. Giving and storing feedback in electronic formats has real benefits and removes illegibility issues that can sometimes be cause for student complaint.

Practical tips: • Use electronic annotation on scripts to enable the student to see exactly what you are commenting on • Try using audio visual/audio (e.g. Jing or Audacity) feedback through spoken critiques in MP3 or web based format. • Build a 'feedback bank' of common comments, from which you can copy and paste – this frees up time to personalise key sections of feedback.

7. Make the most of face to face feedback

There is a power dynamic that exists between the lecturer and the student (Pimentel Botas, 2011). It is important to recognise this and make efforts to ensure that the face-to-face feedback environment is comfortable and conducive to discussion.

Practical tips: • Sit at the same height as the student • Use open body language to put the student at ease (avoid crossed legs and arms) • Be clear about the time boundaries • Use open questions e.g. 'what did you get out of this module/placement/assignment?' to encourage dialogue, and find out where the student thinks they have done well or could improve • Invite the student to make notes of the discussion and check this through with them at the end to ensure that they have captured the important feedback.