

How to Provide Meaningful Feedback: Teacher's Guide



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Why Provide Feedback?

No matter how a teacher provides feedback—verbally or visually, to a group or one on one, publicly or subtly—the goal is the same: to improve students’ academic and behavioral outcomes. Feedback is a simple practice that requires little active planning but has a significant impact.

Is Feedback Effective?

Researchers Hattie and Timperley (2007) examined the impact of feedback on academic outcomes, finding an overall effect size of 0.79. An effect size notes the strength of an intervention’s effectiveness. Although the size of an effect can differ based on the intervention components, generally, an effect size of 0.20 is considered small, 0.50 is considered moderate, and 0.80 is considered large. The large effect size for feedback means that it is one of the most effective instructional methods for improving student outcomes.

In this brief, we describe the components and types of effective teacher feedback and provide examples, nonexamples, and tips that teachers can use in the classroom.

Preparing for Targeted Feedback

The first step in providing effective feedback is to prepare. Teachers should prepare for a lesson with several questions in mind, including the following:

- What are the short- and long-term instructional and behavioral goals for this unit?
- How will I monitor students' progress toward success?
- What topics will I cover?

By answering these questions, a teacher can target student feedback to the most important goals and objectives of the lesson.

Feedback also should be framed and delivered with student needs in mind. Students with disabilities have goals for learning and/or behavior in an individualized education plan (IEP), which teachers can refer to. If a student does not have an IEP, the teacher can create general academic or behavior goals based on student data. This alignment of feedback with student goals helps teachers avoid extraneous feedback that hinders student progress.

Example:

McKai, a seventh-grade student, has difficulty combining like terms in math class. His teacher knows that the class will continue to combine like terms for the next 2 weeks. The lesson objective for this day, however, is coefficient distribution, and this concept will be reviewed only once. When circulating to give feedback to students, instead of providing feedback to McKai on two problems that involve combining like terms, the teacher gives feedback on the problems targeting coefficient distribution. Although McKai still needs practice on combining like terms, he will receive that practice for the remainder of the unit using various math operations. McKai's teacher gave individualized feedback, tied to the unit and lesson, that will help McKai reach his mathematical goals.

Components of Effective Feedback

Researchers have identified several components of meaningful and effective feedback, including feedback that is **goal directed**, **constructive**, **immediate**, and **respectful** (Kennedy, Peeples, Romig, Mathews, & Rodgers, 2018).

Goal Directed

Feedback can set a clear goal for the student.

Examples:

- “That is a great hypothesis. Now, find a piece of evidence from our lab to support your statement.”
- “Nice job counting change. When we go on our next outing, you will purchase your own snack.”

Nonexample: “Everyone needs to be quiet.”

Constructive

Constructive feedback offers more information than whether a student was right or wrong; instead, it demonstrates that the teacher will support students in reaching their goals.

Examples:

- “You found two errors in this sentence so far. Check your comma rules and look one more time for another error.”
- “We are speaking too loud for partner practice. Let’s practice so I can check your volume before we start again.”

Nonexample: “Number 4 is wrong. Check it again.”

Immediate

Feedback should be given as quickly as possible, especially if students are learning something for the first time. Teachers should quickly correct misconceptions or incorrect procedures to decrease the likelihood that they will occur again.

Example: After de-escalating a situation, a teacher says, “I understand that you’re frustrated. What strategies do we use when we’re frustrated? Remember, hitting is never an option.”

Nonexample: “You didn’t arrive to class on time last week. This is creating a bad habit.”

Respectful

When providing feedback, teachers should be positive and respectful. One can point out errors without belittling a student. Providing feedback positively and respectfully is especially important for students with low motivation.

Examples:

- “I love your attention to detail in organizing your number line. Using your fraction blocks, check which should come first: $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{3}{5}$.”
- “You seemed nervous in class during our practice presentations. What can I do to support you so that your final presentation is the best it can be?”

Nonexample: “You are almost an adult and you need to act like one.”

Types of Feedback

Teacher feedback can be used in a variety of situations and for a variety of purposes. Sometimes, feedback focuses on students' performance in or understanding of a **task**. Other times, students need feedback on the **process** for a behavior or task. Some students, including students with disabilities, need feedback on **self-regulation** (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

Task Feedback

One of the easier types of feedback to give, task feedback provides students with information about their level of performance or understanding in relation to an academic task or behavior.

Examples:

- A teacher reminds a student to knock before entering by saying, "We knock to alert someone that we are here. If we do not knock, how will they know we are here?"
- While circulating the classroom during independent practice, a teacher notices that students are confusing plant and animal cell parts. The teacher says, "Go to the t-chart in your notes where we listed the plant and animal cell parts to check which type of cell has chloroplasts."
- During group practice on capitalization, a teacher calls on Karl to spot the grammatical error in a sentence. Karl picks the word *dog* to be capitalized instead of *Pennsylvania*. The teacher prompts Karl with, "Although *dog* can be a name, it is not in this sentence. What word is a proper noun?"

Process Feedback

Process feedback relates to strategies students use to catch errors, check their work, and use cues around them to facilitate learning. This type of feedback should be delivered quickly after the behavior or task. Process feedback is often used during guided practice after students are comfortable with a behavior or task.

Examples:

- A teacher directs a student to check a specific part of a process by saying, "Check to see whether your theme statement aligns with your evidence."
- During whiteboard practice, a teacher notices many students making the same mistake and says, "Using our chart on the wall, please take a minute to check your problem. Pay close attention to step 2."
- After de-escalating a situation, a teacher checks in with a student by saying, "I can see that the test made you frustrated. What will you do the next time you are frustrated?"

Self-Regulation Feedback

This type of feedback helps students self-monitor and correct themselves, instead of relying on a peer or teacher. Self-regulation feedback takes time, as students need frequent practice to learn to regulate their academic performance and behavior. The long-term goal is to help students make a connection between effort and success.

Examples:

- A teacher reminds students to take clear notes because they will be able to use the notes on a test.
- Seeing that a student is anxious, a teacher brings a coloring sheet to the student and says, “Remember, when you’re feeling anxious, you can always get up to grab a coloring sheet.”
- At the end of class, a teacher says, “I saw only two people write the homework assignment. Everyone, in the next 20 seconds, write the assignment in your homework tracker.”

General Praise Vs. Specific, Constructive Feedback

Although telling a student “Good job” is easy, it does not help the student to grow because this praise is not tied to a specific, controllable behavior. When praise is not specific, students may not know what they did wrong or how to improve. Likewise, when praise does not target behaviors that students can control (e.g., effort) and instead refers to innate ability (e.g., intelligence, athleticism), students may react more negatively to future setbacks (Royer, Lane, Dunlap, & Ennis, 2019).

Making Feedback Specific and Constructive

Turn This...	Into This...
“You did a great job on this test.”	“I can tell you studied hard to prepare for this test.”
“You should act more like a high school student.”	“I have the expectation that students take notes during the lecture.”
“Great job coming into class today.”	“Everyone did a great job gathering materials before heading to their desk.”
“Number 2 is so close. Check your work.”	“Check your regrouping on number 2.”
“Marcia is being a model student.”	“I appreciate the way that Marcia is not throwing her paper scraps on the floor.”
“You’re being unsafe.”	“It is not safe to keep the burner running during the experiment. Make sure that you turn it off between uses.”

Reminders

As we have discussed here, feedback is beneficial for student development. In fact, frequent feedback is a key part of explicit instruction (Kennedy et al., 2018). Research has shown that frequent feedback is especially helpful when students are learning a new skill (Wolery, Ault, Doyle, & Gast, 1986). Over time, as students master tasks, they may need less feedback on that specific skill (Wolery & Gast, 1984).

It can be challenging to remember to provide feedback frequently, but it is a habit worth developing. Try the following tips for providing frequent feedback to students:

- Write feedback into your lesson plan.
- Carry a roster during independent practice. When you provide feedback, mark a tally next to the student's name. Set a goal of reaching a specific percentage of students each class. Make sure to account for all students!
- Set a goal for the number of times to provide feedback. Put rubber bands on your wrist or tokens in your pocket. When you provide feedback, move the tokens from one pocket to the other or rubber bands from wrist to wrist.
- Set a timer to vibrate mode for short intervals (e.g., 30 seconds, 1 minute). When the timer goes off, provide feedback.
- Print and affix the last page of this guide to a clipboard, desktop, or other surface that is often in your view.

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HIGH-QUALITY FEEDBACK

