Understanding what feedback is

In this guide, you will reflect on your understanding of what feedback is and how it can be useful.

# Introduction

Academic feedback is similar to any other kind of feedback that you might have seen or experienced being delivered. Consider an athlete training for the Olympic Games. Over a period of years, they prepare for the Games to be a true test of their athletic ability. During their training, they will have a coach who is responsible for guiding them and advising them on the approach that they take to practising and preparing over time. The coach provides advice on technique, different exercises, and warming up and down. The coach will also be motivating and supportive, encouraging good behaviours and areas for improvement in their feedback.

While you are at University, the teaching staff you interact with are your coaches and they will provide you with the feedback, advice, and guidance that you need to develop your academic skills and complete your degree to the best of your ability.

This is not without its challenges. There are many things that can stand in our way during our training. Similar to any other feedback, the feedback you receive on your academic performance can be difficult to hear, and it can often be a challenge to know how to take further steps to act on the feedback.

This is where our feedback resource is going to be of use to you. Students’ use of feedback is an area of great international research and we want to translate the concepts into action you can take to make the most of the feedback you receive.

Working through this resource to reflect on the purpose of feedback, you will consider how you have made use of feedback in the past and see how you can engage further with the feedback that you receive to improve the development of your skills.

# What is feedback?

Before reading the rest of this post, take a moment to consider what you think feedback is and why it is useful. Watch the video (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dmv8eG5hDk0) , in which Adelina from the University of Manchester Library’s Student Team explains what feedback is.

Feedback is more than just the grade you receive on a piece of work; it is the comments, advice and constructive criticisms that guide you to develop and improve your work further. Feedback for Learning defines feedback as:

“a process in which learners make sense of information about their performance and use it to enhance the quality of their work or learning strategies.”

This means that feedback is a process of continuous learning, rather than an end of culmination of learning. As a university student, you are responsible for ensuring you actively participate and move through this process yourself to benefit as much as possible from the feedback you are given.

It is important to recognise that feedback is an active learning opportunity, in the same way as tutorials, lectures or any other interaction you have with your tutors. If you did not engage with discussions during a seminar, you would get less out of the experience. Feedback works in the same way: for feedback to be effective, you have to use it actively.

# Using feedback

Read the following statement, then vote on which option best describes you:

"I do not pay as much attention to my feedback comments if I passed with a good grade."

Options:

* This is true for me
* This is not true for me
* Other (describe)

# **How have you engaged with and used feedback in the past?**

## What makes feedback useful?

Feedback is often even more useful than other learning opportunities as it is tailored specifically to you. In [this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb8IJypTVnE), Jain and Megan from the University of Manchester Library’s Student Team explain why they think feedback is useful.

# **What do you think are the benefits of receiving feedback on your work?**

## Feedback literacy

The ability to successfully engage with and benefit from your feedback is called **‘Feedback Literacy’.**

Feedback literacy has three aspects (Sutton, 2012):

1. The ability to **read** feedback
2. The ability to **interpret** feedback
3. The ability to **use** feedback

There are many different approaches to engaging with your feedback which help you achieve these three steps:

* Appreciating feedback
* Making judgements
* Managing the affect
* Taking action

Developing your feedback literacy will allow you to make effective use of the feedback you receive throughout your degree and beyond university! You should act on all feedback you receive on future assignments. This is sometimes referred to as feeding forward. Acting on your feedback will enable you to continually develop and enhance your work.

Watch [the video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3s-cQdjiM4) to find out how feedback has changed Eddie’s approach to work.

Based on what you have learned, and your own responses to the earlier questions and polls, has your understanding of feedback changed, and what will you change in your future use of feedback?

# Feedback in different contexts

Feedback is given and received in many different environments and situations, not just education. Although the modes and methods of feedback may be slightly different, the aims of feedback remain largely the same.

We asked Jason Hui, a sports coach with the University of Manchester, about how he gives feedback when coaching badminton. Watch each video to find out what Jason said.

## 1. [“Can you define the process of feedback for the development of skills as a sports coach?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9aPar7c9bM)

Transcript:

“So, as a sports coach you go through various different amounts of feedback, so as a coach you are always assessing how you approach coaching. So depending on who you're teaching and coaching the students they will have a different particular type of learning style - learning from experimentation, and trying to look how things go, explaining things to the students as well. And, obviously, asking them how they're doing constantly so they're giving you feedback while you're giving them feedback at the same time.”

## 2. [“How do you provide feedback to individuals?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BM07PMrsxVM)

Transcript:

“Depending on the type of individual and what type of feedback they need, and their learning styles, I'll give them a certain target usually and see if they can meet those targets.

In terms of badminton as a whole [that target] maybe [to] provide a certain shot quality or maybe do a certain exercise within in a certain amount of time. And then trying to proceed with that. So with badminton if they're playing certain shots I'll try and get them to play the same shot consistently - 9 out of 10 times in a row - and then they can assess how reliable their shot-making is.”

## 3. [“What methods do you use to track progress?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6sg8nWZYqo)

Transcript:

“Very similarly I'll give them a target, so I'll probably feed some shuttles to a student and then get them to… well, feed about 12 shuttles to the student and maybe make sure that they get 8 shuttles and hit them to a certain region of the court consistently, and if they don't meet that hit then try and get them to build on the basics again and then try and improve them.”

## 4. [“How do you analyse performance?”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSpX8h5akzU)

Transcript:

“So, depending on the student that I'm coaching if they're a competitive student, a competitive player, the I'd get them to… also they're playing games, so they play at a certain standard, play against a certain level of players, then see how well they do points-wise.

In games, in singles, they'll obviously reach a certain number of points if there's a particular opponent. Or maybe one week they'll have a very close match then another subsequent week they'll have the ability to beat an opponent. So that's one way of assessing how they do, and in training it would be generally trying to get them to hit certain targets.”

Now you have watched the videos, what do you think are the core aims of feedback for both the student and the trainer?

# Summary

Now you are aware of feedback and how it can be useful, you can begin to analyse feedback that you have received and form an action plan of how to develop. Read our related posts ‘Analysing your Feedback’ and ‘Acting on Feedback’ linked from the further support section below.

# References

📖 Carless, D., & Boud, D. (2018). The development of student feedback literacy: enabling uptake of feedback. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 35 (3), 31–40.

📖 Sutton, D. (2012). Conceptualizing feedback literacy: knowing, being and acting. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International,* 49(1), 31–40.