**Effective Formative Feedback**

**Criteria-based**

Assessment practice is often norm-based, which means thatstudents’ success is measured in relation to that of their peers. Criteria-based assessment, in contrast, gives students clear standards that they are expected to achieve. Formative feedback that references these criteria helps students see where they have and haven’t succeeded in meeting the demands of the assignment.

Strategy:

* Establish clear expectations for the assignment
* Provide models or exemplars (more than one)
* Give rubrics in advance
* Keep comments focused on expectations and criteria

**Focused on Higher-Order Concerns**

Comments aimed at the sentence level take a lot of time and do not give a student much information to work with. Instead, focus on the broader, more important concerns: Has the student met all of the assignment requirements? Does the student demonstrate adequate analysis and evaluation of key concepts, readings, or theories?

**Constructive/Forward Looking**

Strategy:

* Suggest revisions that will improve the assignment as a whole, rather than just isolated parts
* Give the most comments on early drafts or assignments instead of final or capstone projects

To be useful, feedback must give students concrete strategies they can use to close the gap between the expectations for the assignment and their performance.

**Timely**

For feedback to have its intended effect, students should have an opportunity to do something about it, whether it is improve a draft, write another, similar type of assignment or be better prepared for a following course.

Strategy:

* Aim for quality, not quantity, when commenting.

**Precise/Specific**

Students often do not understand feedback, or misinterpret what the instructor is trying to convey.

**Performance-Based**

Strategy:

* Focus on what the student did and can do, not who they are or what their skills are

The most effective feedback concentrates on how well the student performed on that particular assignment. Not only does this keep focus on the specific areas a student needs to work on to improve, it helps to establish a tone that both insists on rigour and high-level critical thinking while still ensuring that students feel empowered to make the necessary changes.

Strategy:

* Introduce unmarked formative assignments – or only provide grades after feedback has been received and acknowledged.

**Not Attached to Grades**

Students are much more likely to read and act on feedback when it is not attached to grades.

Strategy:

* Ask more questions
* Focus comments on what you see the student trying to achieve, rather than what they have failed to achieve

**Engages Rhetorically**

Students report that the most helpful comments are those that engage with their project as a whole, and provide constructive criticism to help them improve.

Strategy:

* Include opportunities for peer review
* Encourage students to write evaluations of their own assignments – and even submit them along with the assignment.

**Fosters Self-Assessment Skills**

Formative feedback fosters independent learning and aids in transfer by encouraging students to understand the expectations for communication in that discipline, and to monitor their own attempts to meet those expectations.