



MELBOURNE CSHE TEACHING AND LEARNING SHORT GUIDE SERIES

GIVING AND RECEIVING GOOD IN-CLASS FEEDBACK

Samantha Marangell

In-class feedback is an invaluable component of the teaching and learning process. It is an important tool by which students understand how well they are doing and what they need to do differently before completing their final assessments and receiving their summative marks. It also enables teachers to assess how well their students are following along and comprehending the material, after which they can adjust their teaching and lesson planning as necessary.

However, giving effective feedback in-class can be difficult. It is often provided in the moment, requiring the teacher to respond more quickly than with assessment feedback. In addition, in-class feedback is often given publicly, in front of a whole class of students, which means it risks embarrassing a student when delivered poorly. While there are always exceptions to these usual characteristics, the on-the-spot and public nature of in-class feedback can make it difficult to deliver effectively and confidently. The purpose of this short guide is to highlight the most important considerations for giving and receiving effective in-class feedback.

The purposes of in-class feedback

Frequent, regular feedback can serve the following purposes, among others:

For students

- To allow students to become aware and in control of their own learning progress
- To give students the opportunity to adjust their learning practices to better meet a learning objective
- To inform students about how well they are doing in relation to a specific learning objective

For teachers

- To check students' understanding before moving on to more complex topics and tasks
 - To inform decisions around teaching practice (e.g., timing, pacing, and delivery of information)
 - To identify and then correct students' errors and misunderstandings
 - To receive information on the effectiveness of one's teaching practices and lesson plan
-

Directions of feedback

In-class teaching and learning practices should allow for multidirectional giving and receiving of feedback in the classroom. Some common directions of in-class feedback:

Teacher → Student

The teacher provides information to an individual student about how well they are doing and the extent to which their current understanding and effort is on track to meet the learning objectives.

Teacher → Whole class

The teacher provides information to the whole class about information that needs clarifying, common misconceptions that need correcting, or ways to redirect students' thinking.

Student → Teacher

The teacher receives information about students' progress or current understanding of the material. This is commonly done through an unmarked quiz, a practice assessment, or through targeted questions that assess how well students understand the material and monitoring of students' responses during in-class discussion.

Student → Student

Classmates can provide each other with information about their ideas and progress. They can do this through comments on each other's assignment drafts, giving feedback after practice presentations, or through unassessed groupwork in which students must collaborate. This can be formal, through a structured rubric, or informally through discussion and exchange of ideas.

There is often overlap between these directional flows. For example, when a teacher corrects a student during an in-class discussion, the other students similarly receive the information that the initial idea was not quite right. Ideally, this correction also includes information about how and why an idea might not have been correct; and that all students can then benefit from this information.

Principles of good feedback

While feedback models continue to be revised, basic principles have remained consistent.

1. Be specific

The focus of feedback should be on giving actionable advice that students can use to improve what they are doing. To be actionable, it needs to be specific and clear about what students are doing both incorrectly and correctly. Provide them with an example of what they are doing that is accurate and inaccurate, and then explain how and why those examples do or do not work.

2. Be timely

Information that is given too late will be more difficult to apply. Positive feedback that acknowledges when a student has demonstrated a desired strategy or skill is especially valuable when given in a timely manner. However, balancing timeliness with sensitivity is also important; if commenting on a student's work publicly may lead to embarrassment or confusion, speaking with the student privately after class might be preferable.

3. Focus on the learning objective

Feedback should be about the learning, not about the student as a person. It should reference a specific skill, aim, or learning strategy.

4. Be sensitive

Speaking up in class can be scary for students. Effective feedback encourages continued participation by being helpful and clear but not overly critical or condescending.

5. Allow time for clarification

One of the main benefits of in-class feedback rather than assessment feedback is that it allows for clarification and two-way exchange between the teacher and students. After you have given a student feedback on their work or idea, give them the opportunity to clarify or to ask you for clarification.

Correcting a response or idea

It can be difficult to correct a student in front of the rest of the class, such as in a whole-class discussion. However, this type of feedback does not need to be awkward or uncomfortable.

Practice these steps:

1. Acknowledge what was done well—but only if it was done well.
2. Give the student the opportunity to correct themselves first. Use prompting questions to guide the student into considering an alternative perspective.
3. Frame your feedback as expanding their idea or moving it along, rather than as correcting their ‘wrong’ answer. But remember: if a response is completely wrong, make sure the students do not leave class thinking it was correct.
4. If appropriate, thank the student for their contribution, especially if participation has been difficult to encourage.

Setting up the opportunity for feedback

Giving feedback in the middle of class time can feel as if it is a reactionary practice, usually in the form of responding to a student’s comment or idea. However, it can also be a preemptive practice, and it is additionally valuable to arrange for opportunities for feedback in the lesson plan.

- As a warm-up or check-in: Conduct an unmarked quiz, poll, or discussion at the beginning of class to remind students of previous concepts and/or prep their thinking for the upcoming topic. This will also allow you to check their understanding and target your delivery appropriately.
- Between tasks/topics: Plan purposefully for a check-in between tasks, even if it is only to ask one or two targeted questions. Allocating a couple of minutes in advance can be preferable to needing to backtrack if students are not on the same page as you.

- As a review: Make sure that students have understood the key concepts of the day, but do not rely on asking “Are there any questions?” Instead, ask targeted questions about the concepts that were most important or create an online quiz in advance that would suit this purpose.
- Ask students for feedback: You can ask students to tell you specifically what they need help on or what concepts are still confusing. This can be done anonymously through online polling programs or blank pieces of paper left on your desk as students leave class.

Helpful Tips

1. Instead of saying what the students ‘should have’ done, try focusing on what ‘could’ be done to elevate, expand, or improve an idea.
2. Don’t forget to comment on what was done well/correctly. This is equally as necessary as correcting what was done poorly.
3. Check that the students have understood your comments. Instead of using ‘yes or no’ questions, check by asking them to try and elaborate or explain back to you what worked.
4. Don’t praise what wasn’t actually done correctly.
5. Likewise, don’t criticize something if it isn’t important for the learning/task at hand.

Ultimately, we cannot ensure how our feedback will be received, but we can endeavor to make our feedback specific, timely, useful, and sensitive.

Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education

Level 1, Elisabeth Murdoch Building, Spencer Road
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia
melbourne-cshe@unimelb.edu.au

 melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au