

End of Subject Assessment Tasks and Feedback Opportunities

Students and academics often understand feedback in different ways. With this flyer, we begin to address some of the ways that feedback is designed, developed, offered and received. We focus on three specific points that might help to constructively align the ways that feedback is offered, received and acted upon. These key points are:

- Defining and distinguishing various forms of feedback;
- Engaging and including students in feedback processes; and
- Offering constructive 'ongoing' feedback at the end of semester.

Defining and distinguishing various forms of feedback:

Students understand feedback to be constructive criticism and direction from an expert who has read and digested their work. Students value targeted feedback, followed by a focus on skills and techniques. In the student's view, feedback given during the semester should focus on comprehension of the coursework and any misconceptions, while end-of-semester feedback should be looking at areas for long-term improvement and meta-learning.

Students identify helpful and constructive feedback as:

- Brief comments on my submitted assignment telling me where I went wrong/did well;
- A paragraph or longer of feedback focusing on skills and techniques I need to improve on; and
- The opportunity to speak with my tutor or lecturer who marked my work.

One of the issues identified by students as a concern is the problem of timeliness, summative feedback that is often only made available after the end of the subject. As a result students don't have an opportunity to implement recommendations for improvement and there are concerns that on some occasions little feedback is given at the end of semester.

Academics are guided by policy and principles that require the provision of balanced, effective and timely feedback, closely aligned with assessment criteria. The Coursework Assessment Design and Methods Procedure requires that students be provided both formative and summative feedback on their academic performance. It suggests that 'Wherever possible, comments should further indicate how a student can improve their performance, and ideally indicate what should be done specifically to achieve outstanding results'. The Coursework Assessment Policy states that 'Assessment will be balanced to provide diagnostic, timely and meaningful formative feedback, as well as summative judgments about academic performance'.

Engaging and including students in feedback processes

For feedback to be productive, it needs to be offered by assessors, received and acted upon by students. In their article 'The Power of Feedback', John Hattie and Helen Timperley understand instruction and feedback as two aspects on a continuum; it begins when students respond to initial instruction and evolves iteratively (2007 82). Hattie and Timperley argue that an ideal learning experience occurs when teachers and students seek answers to each of the following questions:

1. Where am I going? (What are the goals?) *feed up*
2. How am I going? (What progress is being made towards the goals?) *feed back*
3. Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?) *feed forward*

Constructive Ongoing Feedback: 3 Case Studies:

The following case studies provide examples of excellent feedback practice from a range of faculties and subjects of varying scale. Each is an example of successful feedback mechanisms and models that might be redesigned and repurposed for different disciplines. To see a series of creative, pragmatic examples as well as additional context and references, please refer to this flyer's accompanying report, available on the TALQAC website.

Summative Feedback as Formative Across a Degree:

Academics within the Department of Medical Education are tackling the significant challenges around gathering, collating and transforming assessment data into useful feedback. Their innovations are specifically designed to efficiently collect, process and organize disparate assessment data and to use them to develop and deliver meaningful and informative feedback to students and staff. Their automated feedback reports are designed to engage recipients in reflection, to highlight critical errors in knowledge and understanding, to stimulate self-reflection, encourage evaluation of strengths and weaknesses and to lead to the development of plans or strategies for improvement in future learning and practice. This work is informed by educational principles and theory and supported and evaluated by a parallel program of evaluative research. While specifically focused on the Doctor of Medicine program, it has clear potential to influence current and future practice within other Departments across the Faculty and the wider University, and is gaining recognition internationally.

([Dr Anna Ryan and Dr Terry Judd – Department of Medical Education](#))

Providing Engaging Feedback in Large Scale Subjects

The Coordinator of the first year Chemistry subject has developed a template that provides a balance of specific and generic information as well as detailed feedback on each student's performance of assessment tasks. The template offers formative feedback on the mid-semester test and it contextualises marks and feedback in relation to other assessment tasks, highlighting how feedback is relevant to future tasks. It also encourages students to improve their results by reading the specific feedback, attending the learning centre and participating within an online community of peers. Importantly, it offers the student encouragement and uses a nurturing, friendly tone, showing genuine interest in the student's development and success. Further development of this feedback template provides details of the position of a student's relative performance across various areas of assessment (in continuous assessment, in practical tasks and end of semester exams) and measures performance in answering different styles of questions, including multiple choice and longer written responses. This insight helps students identify areas of stronger and weaker performance and it encourages further attention in preparation for exams and in the future.

([Dr Stephen Best and the First Year Chemistry Teaching Team](#))

Feedback on Exams:

A number of subjects at the Law School run examination feedback sessions, where feedback is provided to students on the exam they had written the previous semester. Feedback is given in a range of ways: letting students read very good answers written by other students, alongside their own work; lecturers providing a sample answer, read alongside students' own work; providing individualised comment sheets. In some sessions, answers are discussed orally; in others, a silent self-evaluation format is used. All this is done with a view to improvement, where the skills that had been assessed in the exam can be and are used in the future.

([Professor Ian Malkin, Melbourne Law School](#))

Members of TALQAC's Feedback Working Group include: Dr Wendy Haslem – Co-chair (Arts), Tom Crowley - Co-chair, (UMSU) Caley McPherson – Co-chair, (UMSU), Dr Chi Baik, (Melbourne Centre for the Study of Higher Education), Dr Stephen Best (Chemistry), Associate Professor Sunita Jogarajan (Melbourne Law School), Professor Ian Malkin (Melbourne Law School), Dr Chantal Morton (Melbourne Law School), Associate Professor Clare Newton (Architecture, Building and Planning).

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