FEEDBACK ENCOURAGING GROWTH
USEFUL TIPS & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students quit courses for a variety of reasons, one of the most frequent being a belief that they will not able to reach the required grade. Providing feedback that encourages students to successfully overcome challenges is an effective way to manage student failure. This is especially true to feedback that encourages a **growth mindset**. A growth mindset is one that assumes that it is possible to improve. The opposite is a mindset that takes a less-than-perfect grade as evidence of inability to achieve.

HOW CAN YOU NURTURE YOUR STUDENTS' BELIEF IN THEIR ABILITY TO IMPROVE?

1. **Give feedback that the recipient can use.** Give concrete advice as to how to improve, which the student can take and apply to the next piece of work. If possible, consider designing assessments so that the feedback from one can inform performance on the next one.

2. **Be specific as to how to improve in the future.** What would make this work better? For instance, instead of saying 'the grammar is poor', suggest that the student work on their use of commas or apostrophes. If the student appears to have misunderstood a concept, refer them to resources or services that will allow them to review the basics. A growth mindset thrives when students can see that it is possible for them to improve.

3. **Criticize the work, not the student**. Be specific about the work that is under review, rather than making comments about the student. For example, 'your writing is hard to follow' can easily be perceived as a personal attack even if that was not the intention. To avoid being misread, focus on the specific strengths and weaknesses of the work and avoid phrasing that could be read as implying that a shortcoming of the work is a reflection of the author's ability or worth.

4. **Expect that the highest standards are achievable by all.** Students are quite skilled at telling themselves they can't do something; they do not need to hear this from their teachers. You can raise aspirations by communicating that everyone can meet the learning outcomes and making clear what it takes to do so (e.g., by providing a rubric or marking guide with assignments).

5. **Balance negative feedback with praise.** This doesn't mean avoiding telling hard truths, but it does mean mentioning what was done well and why, instead of only focusing on the negatives.

6. **Provide timely feedback.** For feedback to be useful, the student needs to remember that feedback while doing the work, so providing a small amount of feedback within a couple of days is more useful that a lot of feedback two or three weeks later.

7. **Offer low stakes assessment with feedback.** Let students know how they are performing and how to improve as early as possible (ideally within the first couple of weeks). Consider having multiple low stakes assignments so students have plenty of opportunities to improve.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Fenwick, T. J., & Parsons, J. (2009). *The art of evaluation: A resource for educators and trainers* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: Thompson Educational Publishing.

Marshall, S. (Ed.). (2015). *A handbook for teaching and learning in higher education* (5th ed.). London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge.

If you would like to explore this topic further, consider these Teaching Commons events and resources:

- Workshops on Course and Curriculum Design: http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-cds/workshops-and-courses-for-cds/workshops/course-design-york/
- Assessment Resources: https://www.yorku.ca/teachingcommons/assessment/
- Feedback in Online Courses: https://www.yorku.ca/teachingcommons/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2021/09/Feedback-Handout_Licensed.pdf

Would you like to learn more?

Contact us at Teaching Commons for additional resources, handouts, applications, courses, workshops, examples, advice, assistance, one-on-one consulting, and everything else related to teaching and learning. We are happy and eager to assist you!

✉	Teaching Commons	Yelin Su	Robert D. Winkler
🕸	TC Homepage	BOLD Going Remote	BOLD Institute Open Session
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