



## Tips for students: making the most of your feedback

Feedback is important. You'll get lots of feedback, and this can really deepen your learning. But you need to be *looking* for feedback to get the most from it. And you need to be *receptive* to it when you get it. The following tips can help you make the most of feedback.

### Feedback in general

- 1 *Regard all feedback as valuable.* Whether feedback is in the form of praise or criticism, you will get a lot more out of it if you value it.
- 2 *Feedback from anyone is useful.* While it's understandable to regard the feedback you get from lecturers and tutors as authoritative, you can also get feedback all the time from fellow students, and other people around you.
- 3 *Don't shrug off positive feedback.* When you're complimented on your work, there's a temptation to try to ease any feeling of embarrassment by saying, 'We'll, it's not so special really'. The problem with doing this is that you then start to believe this. It's much better to allow yourself to swell with pride, at least for a little while. This helps you to accept the positive feedback, and to build upon it and do even better next time perhaps.
- 4 *Practise thanking people for their positive feedback.* Simply saying, 'Thanks, I'm glad you liked that' can be enough sometimes. When people are thanked for giving you praise or compliments, they're more likely to do so again, and this means more and better feedback for you.
- 5 *Don't get defensive when feedback is critical.* It's perfectly natural to try to protect yourself from the hurt of critical feedback, but the problem then is that this interferes with the flow of critical feedback to you. The more you can gently probe for even more feedback, the more useful the feedback turns out to be.
- 6 *Thank people for critical feedback too.* Even when you're not actually too pleased with the critical feedback you've just received, it can be useful to say something along the lines, 'Well, thanks for telling me about this, it should be useful for me in future'.
- 7 *Don't just wait for feedback, ask for it.* Don't lose any opportunities to press gently for even more feedback than you already have received. Ask questions, such as 'What do you think was the best thing I did here?' and 'What would have been the most useful change I should make next time I do something similar', and so on.
- 8 *Before you finish an assignment, look back at the feedback you've already received so far.* You can often polish up that assignment quite quickly, and avoid some of the things which caused you to lose marks last time.

### Getting your marked work back

- 9 *Decide to regard it as an important feedback opportunity.* If you really want to learn from whatever feedback you get, you're much more likely to make the most of it.
- 10 *Acknowledge that when you get your work back with a grade, your feelings may run high.* It's not unknown for a student to take a marked assignment to a place outside, set fire to it and then stamp on it! That may indeed make people feel better, but it's a lost learning opportunity (and could be dangerous of course).

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- 11 *Don't take too much notice of the mark or grade you're given.* There is, of course, nothing you can now do about whatever mark or grade you were given. The opportunity is to learn about why you got whatever mark or grade you were given. This can help tremendously with your next assignment.
- 12 *Don't become defensive.* It's all too easy to look at every critical comment as a personal affront. Remind yourself that any critical comments are about what you wrote, not about you as a human being. You can change what you write next time. You don't have to try to change who you are!
- 13 *If your mark wasn't good, find out exactly why.* We learn at least as much through getting things wrong as we do through getting them right. And even if your mark was poor, look carefully for any clues regarding where you did in fact score the marks you got.
- 14 *Don't be too smug if your mark or grade is good.* Try to work out why your work scored well. What did you do that pleased your assessors? How best can you put such things to work again in your next assignment? And even if you did very well indeed, continue to look for what you might have done to make your work even better.
- 15 *Put it away for a while, then look at it again.* The real problem with feedback and marks together is that the marks cloud the picture. When your mind is full of thoughts about getting a high mark (or a low mark), you don't have room to really benefit from the feedback about your work. Once you've got used to whatever mark you were awarded, you will find you are much better able to look dispassionately at the feedback, and get maximum value from it.
- 16 *Don't rest on your laurels.* 'Pride comes before a fall', and so on. If you got a really high mark or grade this time, the chances are that you'll have to work really hard to improve on it – or even to equal it again. Indeed, the chances are that your next mark won't be quite so good. Then you'll be disappointed of course. But you can minimize that pain by learning as much as you can now about why you did well the first time.
- 17 *Analyse your mark or grade against the marking scheme.* Sometimes you'll have access to quite a lot of detail about how the marks were allocated for the assignment. See where your work scored well alongside particular assessment criteria. More importantly, look at where you didn't score well. Try to work out why you missed particular marks. This will be really useful for next time round.
- 18 *Try to look at the feedback fellow students received too.* In fact, it's sometimes easier for you to make sense of the feedback comments on other people's work – you're not too close to that work to have your judgement clouded by emotions. At the same time, fellow students may be able to give you useful insights into the real meaning of feedback comments written on your own work. Besides, looking at other people's marked assignments tells you yet more about the overall 'rules of the game' regarding getting good marks for assignments. The better you become acquainted with these rules, the more marks you can get next time – and indeed in exams too.
- 19 *Don't be afraid to seek clarification.* If you can't understand some of the feedback comments written on your work, find an appropriate time to ask about them. Be careful, however, not to come across as if asking for higher marks. And don't harangue your assessors in corridors or at the end of lectures. Don't make them feel as though their judgement is being challenged – that certainly doesn't help you to endear yourself to them! Make an appointment to see them, so that they have time to explain to you anything you need them to explain.
- 20 *Make yourself an action plan.* For each assignment you have marked, jot down three things you've learned to try to do again next time round, and three things to try to avoid in future. Then you can really let the assignment go, as a useful learning experience, and hang on to your learning, rather than that mark or grade. Now file that assignment, but keep your action plan.