Higher Education Academy

TRANSFORMING TEACHING
INSPIRING LEARNING

The Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit (DEFT)

Dr Naomi E. Winstone – University of Surrey

Dr Robert A. Nash – Aston University

Contents

Feedback Portfolio   52

Overview

Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on students' learning. There is a strong evidence base on effective *delivery* of feedback: what it should contain and how it should be framed. However, we know far less about students' *reception* of feedback information. If we want students to engage with and utilise the feedback we provide, then what skills do they need, and how do we nurture these skills? In this resource, we first outline some of the key contemporary issues facing Higher Education practitioners in the domains of assessment and feedback, and we consider the role and responsibility of the student in the feedback process. We then present a case study, which outlines the development and implementation of the *Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit (DEFT)*. Finally we present each component of the toolkit in turn: a feedback guide, a feedback portfolio, and a feedback workshop.

Acknowledgements

Engaging with Feedback in Contemporary Higher Education

It is widely recognised and documented that feedback can play a fundamental role in supporting students' learning. This point has notably been evidenced through the seminal work of John Hattie, who discovered feedback to be one of the most powerful influences on learning gain (e.g., Hattie & Timperley, 2007). In UK Higher Education, improvements have been made in assessment and feedback practices in recent years (Yorke, 2013). Nevertheless, one persistent concern is impossible to ignore: assessment and feedback are reliably the key aspects of the Higher Education learning experience with which students are least satisfied (Higher Education Funding Council for England, 2015). For these reasons, issues surrounding assessment and feedback are nowadays among the most important concerns of educational practitioners (Nicol, Thomson, & Breslin, 2014), and there has been renewed interest in developing theory and practice in this area. The research literature contains countless examples of innovative assessment design and feedback practice (Evans, 2013; Winstone, Nash, Parker, & Rowntree, in press, c). In parallel, the Higher Education Academy (HEA) has also targeted these issues, for example through its publication of 'A Marked Improvement' (HEA, 2012), and the more recent 'Framework for Transforming Assessment in Higher Education' (HEA, 2016; hereafter, 'the Framework').

Any discussion of feedback must consider its function and value to students. There is wide consensus within the education literature that 'quality' feedback should serve three overlapping functions: (1) an 'orientational' purpose that clarifies the student's performance and achievement; (2) a 'transformational' purpose that enables the student to reflect, improve their performance, and become more autonomous (often termed 'feed-forward); and (3) an 'affective/interpersonal' dimension that gives the student confidence and motivation, and builds a strong teacher-student relationship (Dunworth & Sanchez, in press). It is increasingly evident, then, that assessment and feedback should serve objectives beyond focusing the student on the previous assessment that they completed (and even beyond the subsequent assessment). Likewise, the principle and practice of 'assessment for learning' takes the intended function of assessment to be more than mere evaluation, and instead views the assessment process itself as leading to learning and development (Sambell, McDowell, & Montgomery, 2013). This way of aligning the processes of assessment and learning underpins one of the tenets of the HEAs *Framework*: 'Sustainability'. So-called 'sustainable' feedback practices (which may involve activities such as peer- and self-assessment, dialogue, and goal-setting) can be used to promote student self-regulation, such that over time the student relies less on the support of educators to provide feedback, and becomes adept at seeking and generating feedback for themselves (e.g., Carless, Salter, Yang, & Lam, 2011).

Once common issue that arises in discussion around assessment and feedback is the considerable burden of feedback processes upon those who provide it; academic staff expend huge time and effort in providing detailed feedback on students' work, with what is often judged as disappointing levels student engagement with this feedback. *A Marked Improvement* raises the issue of resource and workload management in this respect, recognising that the time required for delivering quality assessment and feedback is often underestimated.

These issues lead us to consider where the student should be positioned within the feedback process. What is their role? This question was the focus of our own recent work funded by the HEA, in which we studied students' active engagement with feedback; what we termed

proactive recipience (Winstone, Nash, Rowntree & Parker, in press, a). This work had three aims. The first was to better understand how students' proactive recipience of feedback might be improved, tackling this question both by examining research evidence from the fields of education and psychology, and by seeking our students' own viewpoints. Second, to conduct laboratory experiments designed to examine, in controlled ways, some factors that could influence how students engage with feedback. Third, to use this combined evidence-base to inform the design of resources for supporting student engagement with feedback. Our work on this third aim led us to create the *Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit* (DEFT), which is outlined below and in the accompanying resources.

Students' engagement with feedback

Much research on assessment and feedback focuses on *delivery*: how to communicate, structure, and present feedback optimally, and perhaps in ways that conform with what students say they want (e.g., Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006; Winstone, Nash, Rowntree, & Menezes, in press, b). This focus represents what David Carless (2015) refers to as the 'old paradigm' of thinking around assessment and feedback. However, many have observed that focusing resources on delivering increasing quantities of feedback, or even on improving the quality of that feedback, does not necessarily guarantee the desired effects. Students' engagement with feedback can be disappointing, irrespective of how 'optimal' it is. Indeed, whereas some students engage readily with feedback (e.g., Higgins, Hartley, & Skelton, 2002), others in contrast read their feedback cursorily (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004), fail to implement the recommendations their teachers make (Hyland, 1998), or fail to even collect their feedback in the first place (Hounsell, 2007; Sinclair & Cleland, 2007).

These observations make salient the fact that giving and receiving feedback is a process of communication, and that students' active participation in this process is therefore crucial (Brown, 2007). In short, it is essential for us to understand not only how best to design and send the feedback 'message', but also how to influence the way students receive that message – that is, what they *do* with it. This emphasis, Carless (2015) terms the 'new paradigm': one that frames feedback as a process of dialogue, wherein students' involvement, engagement, and implementation of feedback is crucial. When framed as a dialogue, the feedback process automatically becomes a two-way system in which the student occupies a central role. Engaging in dialogue might involve undertaking peer assessment, requesting feedback on specific aspects of one's work, or receiving formative feedback on drafts; tasks such as these require "coordinated teacher-student and peer-to-peer interaction as well as active learner engagement" (Nicol, 2010, p. 503).

Elsewhere, Margaret Price and colleagues have been influential in shifting the mindsets of scholars and practitioners towards issues of students' engagement with feedback (e.g., Price, Handley, & Millar, 2011). One important aspect of their work is that it highlights *at which stages* in the assessment and feedback process students might become disengaged, such as when they fail to collect their written feedback, or when they read but cannot understand the feedback. This work therefore draws our attention to what might happen at each of these stages to create barriers to engagement, and prepares us to think about how we might conceivably remove those barriers.

So why might students not engage with feedback? Based on a review of a portion of the research literature on feedback, Jonsson (2013) outlined five barriers: (1) students do not find the feedback useful; (2) they do not know how to act upon the feedback; (3) the feedback is

not sufficiently specific, detailed, or individualised; (4) the feedback's style is too authoritative; and (5) students find the feedback difficult to understand. More recent work by Pitt and Norton (in press) also highlights that students may not be able to engage with feedback if they do not understand the complex academic terminology used, and that they can lose motivation to engage with feedback if they perceive that their effort might not pay off.

Some of the barriers described thus far, as well as many others, have also surfaced in our own empirical research. As part of our HEA-funded project, we conducted 11 focus groups with 31 undergraduate Psychology students, who completed activities designed to get them talking about how they use feedback (Winstone et al., in press, a). For example, the students read several genuine feedback comments, and they discussed what they would do if they received these comments, and what they normally do when they receive feedback. We were most interested in the extent to which these discussions highlighted students' view about the barriers that prevent them from using feedback. Based on over 16 hours of recorded discussions, our analysis led us to identify four types of barriers: (1) a lack of **awareness** of what the feedback means and what its purpose is; (2) a lack of **cognisance** of appropriate strategies for putting feedback into use, and opportunities available to support them to do so; (3) a perceived lack of **agency** to implement those strategies; and (4) a lack of the necessary **volition** to engage with and use feedback. These four types of barrier represent psychological processes that each requires intervention to resolve.

Partnership in the feedback process

Identifying the diverse barriers to students' engagement with feedback provokes a new question: whose responsibility is it to resolve these barriers? This is an important issue because designing appropriate interventions and resources to overcome barriers rests on having a shared understanding of the relative responsibilities of each party. Our focus group research indicated that many students perceive the responsibility to be on their lecturers' shoulders, and believe that academic staff should make it simple for students to put their feedback into action by telling them *exactly* what actions to take. Yet if quality feedback involves a two-way process of dialogue rather than a one-way transmission of information, then students' own responsibilities should in many ways be equivalent to, and in other ways even greater than, those of their lecturers.

Building upon our own and other researchers' findings, we propose that teachers and students must share responsibility for engaging with feedback. For each of the four types of barriers identified from our focus groups, we propose that the responsibility for overcoming the barrier can be divided between student and teacher. For some types of barrier, primary responsibility rests with the academic, whereas for others the balance weighs more heavily on the student (Nash & Winstone, forthcoming). For instance, in terms of what we called 'awareness,' the academic has foremost (but not sole) responsibility for removing barriers, by ensuring that the feedback they deliver to students is clear, using language and terminology that students will understand. Furthermore, the academic controls many aspects of assessment and feedback design that in turn contribute to students' appreciation of assessment processes and standards: what is often termed 'assessment literacy (e.g., Price, Rust, O'Donovan, Handley, & Bryant, 2012). Assessment literacy is a crucial component of students' academic development that, according to the *Framework*, should be built into the design of programmes. Another relevant tenet of the HEA's *Framework* is 'developing assessment that is fit for purpose.' A common barrier to students putting their feedback into practice stems from the common modularised

structure of many degree programmes, wherein assessment is often 'end-loaded' within modules, with the consequence that students see limited transferability of feedback information from one assignment to the next. The *Framework* emphasises that an important part of designing assessment that is fit for purpose is the emphasis on programme-level learning outcomes. Such a strategy overcomes the restricted focus on module-level learning outcomes, and enables students to see how individual assessments converge to support their development towards these higher-level outcomes. Designing assessments such that they serve this purpose is an important part of the responsibility of the educator.

In short, there are important steps for educators to take within assessment and feedback practices to maximise the potential for student engagement. Yet in many other respects, educators have far less influence over students' feedback use. For example, we cannot easily make students *want* to use their feedback. We can provide environments that nurture students' volition to engage, but the primary motivation has to come from them.

The 'Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit' (DEFT) was developed to support educators and students to work together in partnership, to overcome some of the key barriers to student engagement with feedback. The resources contained in the toolkit are designed to be flexible, such that an educator can choose different elements that seem most applicable to their students' discipline area or level of study. The resources illustrate activities for supporting students in their engagement with feedback, and should ideally be embedded into wider institutional or programme level strategies for developing students' assessment literacy and self-regulation.

Before presenting the toolkit itself, we first outline how the toolkit was developed and how we implemented it in our own discipline of Psychology. We also share some of the lessons we learned when implementing these resources.

Case study: The development and implementation of the *Developing Engagement with Feedback Toolkit*

As we have described in the previous section, one aim of our HEA-funded project was to develop resources for helping our students to better engage with their feedback. Based on consultative work with our Psychology undergraduates at the University of Surrey, we developed a toolkit of resources for tackling the main barriers to students' engagement with feedback (see Winstone et al., in press, a). The final toolkit comprised three resources:

1. **Feedback guide.** Our first resource was a written guide for students, containing advice and tips on how to make good use of their feedback. Two of our undergraduates led the preparation of this resource: one who worked with us full-time during his professional training year, and another second-year who volunteered as a research assistant. Their input was invaluable in allowing us to combine our understanding of the research evidence, with students' own perspectives on what kinds of guidance would benefit them. Two of the elements within the guide are of particular note. First, the guide contains a flowchart, which students can use to judge when and how they should attempt to implement their feedback. This flowchart is incredibly simplistic, and yet has been received extremely positively by students and teaching practitioners. Second, the guide contains a glossary, offering explanations of various terms and expressions that they often see in their feedback. We selected terms to include by scrutinising the transcripts from our student focus-groups (Winstone et al., in press, c), looking for terms that the students mentioned not understanding. Some of these terms were expected, but others were fascinating because we had never previously considered they would need clarifying (e.g., "specific"). To create acceptable explanations of these terms, we asked academics in our department to explain what they would mean when using each term. We combined their responses to create consensus definitions, and we double-checked these definitions with our academic colleagues. We now share the feedback guide as a matter of course with our first-year Psychologists during their initial weeks on the course, and make it available to all Psychology students via our VLE.

2. **Feedback workshop.** Whilst conducting our systematic review of the literature on engagement with feedback, we came across suggestions of holding interactive workshops with students (Winstone, Nash, Parker, & Rowntree, in press, c). We envisaged that such workshops could be excellent forums within which to discuss and reflect on effective strategies for using feedback, the emotional barriers to engaging adequately, and how to take the perspective of the feedback-giver. When we asked our students to rank-order how useful different interventions might be for helping them to better use their feedback, they rated an interactive workshop highly (Winstone et al., in press, a). Of course, how to design such a workshop depends on many factors, such as the amount of time available, the likely group-size, and the students' level of study. We therefore designed a basic workshop 'skeleton' comprising general advice and discussion topics. Alongside this skeleton, we designed a variety of small-group and plenary activities, each focusing on different elements of feedback literacy (Sutton, 2012), one or more of which could be used within the workshop. For instance, one activity requires students to look at exemplar feedback comments, and to brainstorm what concrete actions they could possibly take as means to address each comment. All of our first-year

Psychology undergraduates now take part in a feedback workshop, and many report this to be a valuable part of their academic skills training.

3. **Feedback portfolio.** One of the undesirable discoveries we made during our project was how frequently students fail to even look at written feedback, and the minimal extent to which they ever look at it more than once. We learned that many students simply read their feedback once over, and then put it in a drawer and never see it again. We believed it important to place a stronger emphasis on how feedback influences students' developmental trajectory, rather than as a series of unrelated comments about unrelated assignments. One idea that emerged from our systematic review was a 'portfolio' repository in which students could organise and reflect upon their feedback. When we asked our students to rank-order how useful different interventions might be, they rated this idea highly. In our department, students were accustomed to submitting assignments and receiving feedback electronically via our Virtual Learning Environment. We therefore worked with our e-Learning advisor to develop an electronic portfolio tool, which automatically gathered all of each student's submitted assignments in one place, alongside all of the feedback they had received for those assignments. By accessing this tool, students were therefore able to see multiple pieces of feedback together, which we believed would facilitate their sense of progression, and their ability to detect recurring themes in their feedback that they might not otherwise see. As part of this tool, we incorporated space for students to reflect on their development at intermittent points in the year, and for this reflection to be discussed with their personal tutor.

Five lessons learned

Through developing and testing these resources with our Psychology undergraduates, we learned many important lessons, of which five stand out in particular:

1. What seems patently obvious and unambiguous to the academic who gives feedback can often be highly unobvious and confusing to the student who receives the feedback.

2. Talking to students about the specific instances of feedback they have received is important, but insufficient; we must also more actively and critically discuss the concept of feedback in general, and the experience of receiving feedback.

3. We as teachers are frequently in the same boat as students, being reluctant to engage with feedback from journal peer-reviews, for example, or from teaching evaluations. Reflecting on these experiences can help us to identify the problems and some solutions, and to discuss the pertinent issues openly with our students with some humility.

4. The barriers to using feedback are as much emotional as they are practical; dealing with feedback effectively may require us to nurture students' emotional intelligence.

5. There is no magic bullet – the students who need most to engage with their feedback may still be those who use these kinds of support least. Promoting engagement with feedback may therefore require us to embed resources and opportunities within the compulsory curriculum, rather than making engagement optional.

References

Brown, J. (2007). Feedback: The student perspective. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education, 12*, 33-51.

Carless, D. (2015). *Excellence in University Assessment.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Carless, D., Salter, D., Yang, M., & Lam, J. (2011). Developing sustainable feedback practices. *Studies in Higher Education, 36*, 395-407.

Dunworth, K., & Sanchez, H. S. (in press). Perceptions of quality in staff-student written feedback in higher education: a case study. *Teaching in Higher Education.*

Evans, C. (2013). Making sense of assessment feedback in Higher Education. *Review of Educational Research, 83*, 70-120.

Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004). Conditions under which assessment supports students' learning. *Learning and Teaching In Higher Education, 1*, 3-31.

Hattie, J., & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research, 77*, 81-112.

Higgins, R., Hartley, P. & Skelton, A. (2002). The conscientious consumer: Reconsidering the role of assessment feedback in student learning. *Studies in Higher Education, 27*, 53-64.

Higher Education Academy (2012). *A Marked Improvement: Transforming assessment in higher education.* York, UK: HEA.

Higher Education Academy (2016). *Framework for transforming assessment in higher education.* York, UK: HEA.

Higher Education Funding Council for England (2015). Student satisfaction remains high at UK Universities and colleges. Last modified 12/8/15.
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/Name,104948,en.html

Hounsell, D. (2007). Towards more sustainable feedback to students. In D. Boud, & N. Falchikov (Eds.), *Rethinking assessment in Higher Education. Learning for the longer term* (pp. 101-113). London: Routledge.

Hyland, F. (1998). The impact of teacher written feedback on individual writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 7*, 255-286.

Jonsson, A. (2013). Facilitating productive use of feedback in higher education. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 14*, 63-76.

Nash, R. A., & Winstone, N. E. (forthcoming). A model of responsibility-sharing in the giving and receiving of assessment feedback.

Nicol, D. (2010). From monologue to dialogue: improving written feedback processes in mass higher education. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, 35*, 501-517.

Nicol, D. J., & Macfarlane-Dick, D. (2006). Formative assessment and self-regulated learning: a model and seven principles of good feedback practice. *Studies in Higher Education, 31*, 199-218.

Nicol, D., Thomson, A., & Breslin, C. (2014). Rethinking feedback practices in higher education: a peer review perspective. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, *39*, 102-122.

Sambell, K., McDowell, L., & Montgomery, C. (2013). *Assessment for learning in higher education*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Pitt, E., & Norton, L. (in press). 'Now that's the feedback I want!' Students' reactions to feedback on graded work and what they do with it. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*.

Price, M., Handley, K., & Millar, J. (2011). Feedback: Focusing attention on engagement. *Studies in Higher Education, 36*, 879-896.

Price, M., Rust, C., O'Donovan, B., Handley, K., & Bryant, R. (2012). *Assessment literacy: The foundation for improving student learning*. ASKe, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development.

Sinclair, H. K., & Cleland., J. A. (2007). Undergraduate medical students: Who seeks formative feedback? *Medical Education, 41*, 580-582.

Winstone, N. E., Nash, R. A., Parker, M., & Rowntree, J. (in press, c). Supporting learners' agentic engagement with feedback: A systematic review and a taxonomy of recipience processes. *Educational Psychologist.*

Winstone, N. E., Nash, R. A., Rowntree, J., & Menezes, R. (in press, b). What do students want most from written feedback information? Distinguishing necessities from luxuries using a budgeting methodology. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.*

Winstone, N. E., Nash, R. A., Rowntree, J., & Parker, M. (in press, a). "It'd be useful, but I wouldn't use it": Barriers to university students' feedback seeking and recipience. *Studies in Higher Education.*

Yorke, M. (2013). Surveys of the student experience and the politics of feedback. In S. Merry, M. Price, D. Carless, & M. Taras (Eds.), *Reconceptualising feedback in higher education: Developing dialogue with students* (pp. 6-18). Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Feedback Guide

Contents

How to use the resource

This resource can be given to students to encourage them to better understand the importance of feedback, and how to use it effectively. The guide also contains a glossary of terms commonly used in feedback, and flowchart to encourage students to seek answers to their own questions when reading feedback. The guide (which can be downloaded as a separate, editable document) can be printed and given to students in hard copy, or an electronic copy can be made available on a Virtual Learning Environment.

How to Use Feedback Effectively

A guide for students

What is this guide for?

Feedback is essential for your development as a learner, but it's not always obvious how to use it! Research points to four key reasons why students struggle to use their feedback:

1. The language can be difficult to understand. Your tutors typically use specific marking schemes to ensure that their marking is consistent and transparent. Unfortunately, these marking schemes aren't always clear or easily understandable for students. This guide will help you to clarify some of the terms commonly used in assessment feedback.

2. It can be difficult to know what practical steps you could take. Even if you understand the feedback, it's often the case that you think "Well, what can I DO with this?" This guide contains some ideas of concrete strategies for putting your feedback into action.

3. It can feel like using feedback is pointless. It may sometimes feel like putting feedback into action doesn't pay off, perhaps because you have different assignments for different modules, or because you feel like your weaknesses are impossible to change. This guide will show why using feedback is never futile!

4. It can be difficult to feel motivated. On top of everything else, you may feel quite demotivated by feedback. It can feel like a lot of effort to use feedback, and may seem like it's somebody else's responsibility to help you improve. This guide will show you the importance of taking responsibility for using feedback, and some ideas of how to track your progress.

General Advice

> **What is feedback?** *Feedback is any kind of information that someone gives you about your performance, skills, and understanding, and can represent one of the best opportunities for improving. Feedback could be a grade on your essay, or comments or suggestions given to you verbally or in writing. It might come from your tutors, but might also come from friends, family, or even from yourself.*

- **Listen to your feedback!** *Many students don't even take any notice of their feedback! This can be for many reasons, but it's very difficult to improve "magically" without getting any input on what to do differently, and how. Ignoring your feedback makes it difficult to improve.*

- **What issues are the feedback highlighting?** *Your feedback will tell you where you have earned marks, and where you can improve.*

- **What solution does the feedback propose?** *Your feedback may also include advice on how to improve. It's important to try and find this direction, which can be invaluable. Sometimes you may need to read between the lines. For example, if you're told your essay structure was weak, this should make you think about how to improve your structuring in future, not just why it wasn't better last time.*

What if...?

I'm really happy with my grade! I don't need to read the feedback, do I?

Because you have done well, you presumably will want to ensure you do just as well next time – your feedback will help you to understand <u>why</u> you did so well, and this shows what you should do again in future. Also, maybe you could do even better next time - look out for ideas on how to improve.

The grade has made me feel really awful, I don't want to read the feedback!

This is understandable! A bad grade can knock your confidence and motivation. But it's important to remember that the feedback is about <u>your work</u>, not about <u>you as a person</u>. It may help to put your feedback aside for a few days before you look at it properly. When you come back to it, it's often easier to absorb and use.

Feedback can be instrumental in telling you WHY you have a disappointing mark. If you ignore it, you can't improve. If you need someone to guide you through feedback, the tutor who marked your work may be willing and able.

What if...?

I'm never going to do any other work like this, the feedback is useless!

A lot of students feel this way. But there's always something to gain from feedback, even when it's describing work you will never do again. For example, it may comment on issues that apply to all written assessments, like structure, grammar, or referencing. Or it may comment on other things that you can apply elsewhere, like the quality of your critique, or depth of further reading. If you really can't find anything helpful in your feedback, a meeting with your tutor may help you to find it.

The feedback I've been given is really unhelpful, I can't do anything with it!

Not all feedback is equally constructive and detailed. It may feel uninformative, or maybe you completely disagree with it. Don't dismiss it! Sometimes the most valuable part of feedback is your reflection upon it. For example, even if you disagree with a suggestion, thinking about <u>why</u> can help you clarify your understanding, or realise how you could better justify your arguments. You could also (politely) contact the marker and ask them to discuss it.
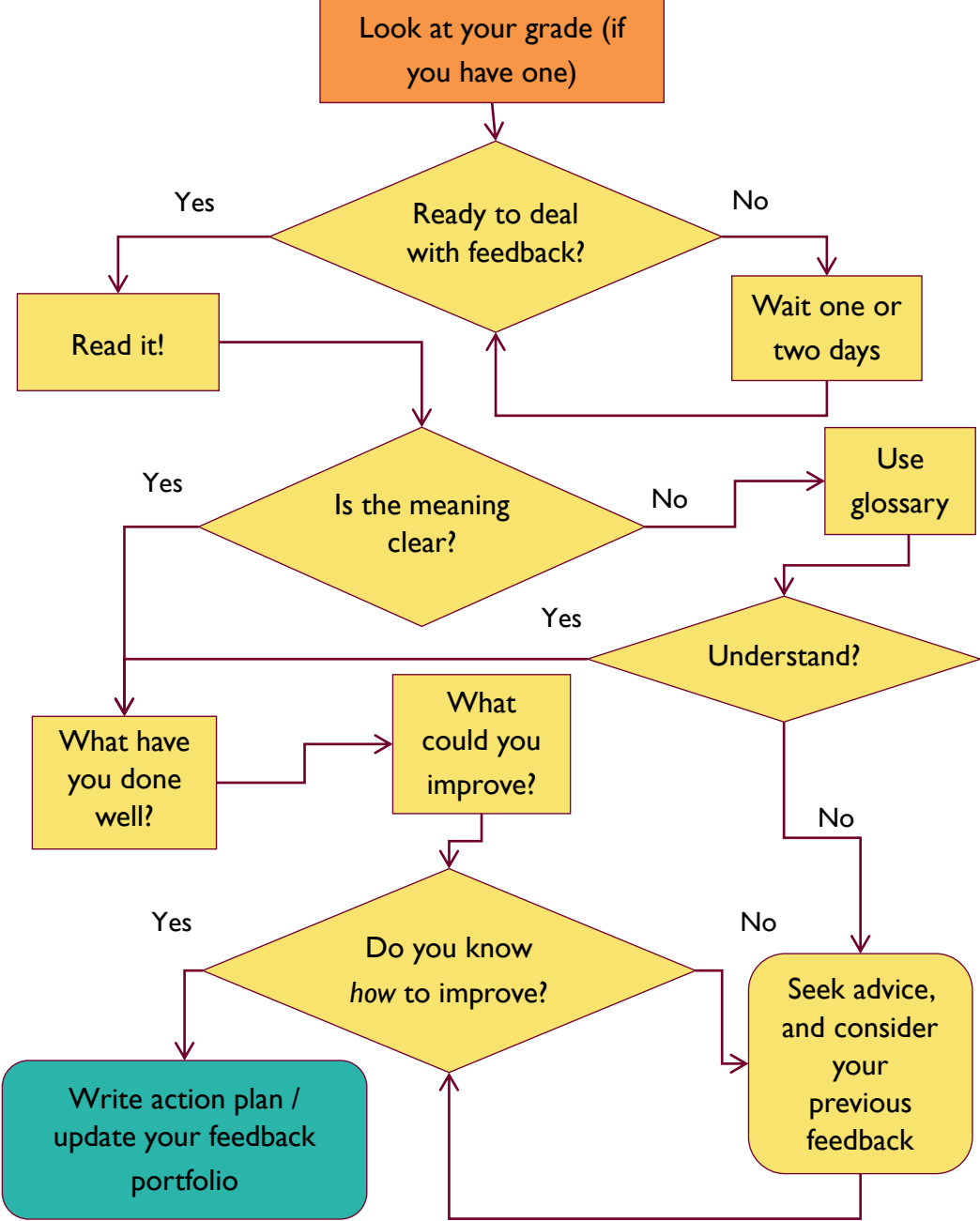
What if…?

There's a specific area I've been told I need to improve.

Some of the feedback comments that students receive come up time and again. Here are some of the common aspects that you may be asked to improve:

Being Critical	When describing studies or theories, ask whether what you've learned about them is necessarily true – are the conclusions questionable? If so, why? Does the evidence actually support the ideas it claims to support? Your university might offer workshops on critical thinking.
The best way to improve structure is to plan your work well before you start writing. What exactly do you want to say? What does the marker need to understand first, before they can understand the rest? How can you make each section of your work flow nicely into the rest, so that the marker won't get lost?	**Structure**
Referencing	Using references appropriately is often tricky, but it's also fairly easy to find out what to do. Check your feedback to see where you often go wrong. Sometimes it's an aspect of formatting that you didn't even know about. You can find referencing style guides online, or you can look in published papers for examples. Have these to hand while you work.
Sometimes students feel so confident in their understanding of a topic, that they forget to show evidence to support their claims. Make sure you back up everything you say with evidence! Also, it's always best to read your primary sources carefully, rather than just reading descriptions of those sources - do they actually say what you think they say?	**Use of evidence**
Writing Style	Your writing style can be hard to change, and the expectations are often much higher at university compared with school or college. When you read papers, don't just focus on what they say, but also on how they are written. If you find papers that are really clear and easy to understand, keep them as examples of the kinds of style you could emulate.

Feedback flowchart

Look at your grade (if you have one)

Ready to deal with feedback?

Yes → **Read it!**

No → **Wait one or two days**

Is the meaning clear?

No → **Use glossary**

Yes → **What have you done well?**

Understand?

Yes

No → **Seek advice, and consider your previous feedback**

What could you improve?

Do you know _how_ to improve?

Yes → **Write action plan / update your feedback portfolio**

No → **Seek advice, and consider your previous feedback**

You are not alone...

Many students think they are the only one who struggles with feedback, and that all other students somehow just "get it". In fact, most students struggle with one or more aspects of feedback. We've collected some quotes here from undergraduate student, to show that you're not alone.

It's very subjective, depending on the lecturers you go to and the markers. So now it's, like, there's no point in even -- well, you should look at your grade, but just take it with a pinch of salt.

I always get feedback in my work that, like, 'Your arguments aren't clear.' But it's like, 'Okay, I understand that, like I've heard this -- this comment a million times, but tell me where and how.

Like, if you're someone who does actually sit down and look at it, and actually take it in, then you're gonna find it really useful. But I, personally, just put it in folder.

A seventies pair of trousers, isn't it? I just wouldn't know. I just -- I dunno what they mean by flair.

I can imagine the lecturers get quite annoyed if you don't use the feedback, because they've spent loads of time, like, going through it.

I think sometimes on reports, the language use is quite confusing, which seems a bit contradictory. Cos they often say that my language is confusing!

Well, what I know you *should* do when you get a piece of coursework back, is go back through it and see where you feel like you could have improved after, like, you know, having a fresh look at it.

Um, I think ideally, I should go through all my feedback and kind of find the points of commonalities. Erm, and make a list of those and just be aware of those consciously but, again, when you've got five hundred things to do...

...but there's lots you can do.

There are many things you can do to use your feedback. Here, we've collected some more quotes from undergraduate students, describing methods they use. Which of these might work for you?

I make an appointment with a learning advisor to improve on the areas which I have been told I need to improve on

Sometimes when completing a piece of work that is similar to a previous one, for example our statistics assignment, I used the previous feedback whilst writing up the latest one, to help me exclude the mistakes I made last time and include everything that I had gotten right beforehand

If I think the points are useful, positive or negative, I write them out on a cue card and keep it for future reference.

At first, I look at the overall mark. Usually I then go through each section of written feedback to see the positive and negative points of my work, referring back to each section as I go to remind myself of what I had written.

I highlight the bits I think will be most helpful, and write them on post it notes ready for further work. I focus on improvements which I can make, and try to see my downfalls and strengths.

I read through the feedback for each section and look for common themes that keep getting brought up on different assignment feedback sheets.

I read through all of the feedback initially. I first look at any positive comments, but spend most of the time on the criticisms. I then look at previous coursework and see if there are in patterns in what I am doing wrong.

Glossary

Sometimes, markers give you feedback and you have no idea what they mean! We asked students which terms can often be confusing when used in feedback, and we asked university teaching staff what they would mean when using these terms. We then summarised their responses.

Abstract
Being too vague about a point by not explaining it in specific language, or by failing to ground it in theory or to use examples (see also 'Concrete').

Address the question
Make sure you're answering the question that is being asked – students sometimes write about topics that miss the point. Make sure your arguments and material are relevant and clearly linked to the question, and you are not simply writing everything you know about the topic.

Assess the limitations of the study
Weigh up aspects of the study and consider weaknesses that might undermine the validity of the study, and/or suggest ways the research could be improved. The weaknesses could be methodological, but may also be with how the authors interpret and present their own findings.

Balanced argument
While it is often valuable to take a stance, be sure to present evidence for the other sides of the argument.

Clarity
Make sure the reader can easily understand what points you have made by writing clearly, and explaining why you have made these points. Sometimes it's just a case of writing straightforwardly, and not assuming the reader will automatically know what you were thinking.

Concise
In your work you need to explain ideas clearly but with fewer words – if you have a word limit, make effective use of it! The marker may think you are waffling. Be succinct and avoid needlessly complicated words and phrases.

Concrete
Make sure you're using clear and specific language to talk about a defined situation or a certain finding, not just vague ideas (see also 'Abstract').

Critically Evaluate/ Critically Analyse
Show that you have actively thought about and questioned the claims you are describing or making. Even if the claims are completely valid, show that you haven't just accepted them at face value.

Depth/Elaborate
Make sure you explain your arguments in detail, using examples where appropriate and working through your ideas rather than simply glossing over them.

Flair
Showing a sophisticated or elegant writing style, or presenting evidence in an original and insightful way.

Flow
Creating a coherent argument by connecting points in a logical order to ensure that the work is easy to follow.

Illustrate
Give examples to back up the points you make, ideally using evidence.

Originality
Demonstrating your own thinking, perhaps by drawing upon research beyond the ones you learned about in class, to make an argument that not every student would have thought of.

Proof-read
Reading work back carefully, or getting another person to read it, to check for spelling and grammar mistakes. You should also check that your arguments make sense, and that everything is phrased clearly.

Range of material
Try and use more than just the material provided by the lecturers, and avoid basing too much of your work on just one or two references.

Specific
Give a more precise and detailed account of what is being described, drawing on particular examples.

Structure
A way of presenting your work so the reader can follow the argument. Make sure your paragraphs are in a logical order, that you show the connections between different paragraphs, and that each section has good beginning and ending sentences.

Synthesis/Integration
Show how different sources and theories go together to make a good argument. A lack of synthesis could mean your essay reads more like a list of research than an argument.

Transparent
Making sure that the thought-process which underlies your argument is clearly expressed. Even if you have a good idea, it's not always easy for the marker to see your train of thought.

Unsubstantiated Claims
An unsubstantiated claim lacks evidence. Make sure you justify your argument by supporting each point with empirical evidence and references. This will create a more persuasive argument.

This feedback guide is adapted from a guide written by undergraduate students at the University of Surrey, in collaboration with Dr Naomi Winstone and Dr Robert Nash. The original guide emerged from a project funded by the Higher Education Academy, which aimed to improve students' ability to engage well with feedback.

Feedback Workshop

Contents

Feedback Literacy Domain	Activities
Knowing	K1 The purpose and function of feedback
	K2 Standards and Criteria
	K3 Feedback as a learning resource
Being	B1 Feedback and identity
	B2 Overcoming barriers
	B3 Using emotion positively
Acting	A1 The process of action
	A2 Identifying actions
	A3 Action Planning

How to use the resources

The Feedback workshop is broadly structured around Sutton's (2012) conceptualisation of feedback literacy, which is defined as "the ability to read, interpret and use written feedback (Sutton, 21012, p. 31). Sutton argues that being literate in the use of feedback involves an ontological dimension ('being'), an epistemological dimension ('knowing') and a practical dimension ('acting'). The activities within the workshop enable students to develop and practice strategies and skills for putting feedback into practice, as well as supporting the development of their feedback literacy in these three areas.

The workshop resource is intended to be flexible. By selecting a set of activities, educators can design a workshop tailored to the needs of their students. One way of using the workshop resources would be to work through all the activities sequentially during a series of tutorials. Another would be to design a workshop involving one activity from the 'knowing' component, one activity from the 'being' component, and one activity from the 'acting' component. Educators may also wish to use individual activities as stand-alone sessions, to target a particular skill or provide a refresher for students at more advanced stages of their programme of study. Where applicable, worksheets/resource templates are also included.

The 'knowing' dimension of feedback literacy involves a student's awareness that feedback provides information *on* knowing; that is, it provides information on their current levels of understanding and skill. However, an equally important function of feedback is *for* knowing- to drive students' learning and skill development. Whilst many students are keenly aware of the

former function, and can interpret a grade or mark, Sutton argues that "engagement with feedback *for* learning is more challenging" (p. 34).

The first activity encourages students to consider the different functions and sources of feedback, as a way for them to appreciate the distinction between feedback *on* and feedback *for* knowing. The second activity in this section provides students with the opportunity to become familiar with the institution's grading criteria/rubrics, and to develop skills of self-assessment. The third and final activity in this section is designed to extend students' appreciation of feedback *for* knowing, by developing their understanding of the learning potential of feedback information.

The 'being' dimension of feedback literacy recognises the personal investment on the part of students in the process of assessment, and how feedback has the potential to shape the learner's identity. The first activity in this section directly addresses this issue, by enabling students to explore their own learner identity and how this is shaped by assessment and feedback. The second activity requires students to surface the potential barriers that might inhibit their engagement with feedback, and to develop solutions to overcome such barriers. The third and final activity in this section directly addresses the emotions that are surfaced by receiving feedback, and encourages students to consider how these emotions can be harnessed to support future development.

The 'acting' dimension of feedback literacy involves the skills necessary to read, understand and implement feedback. The activities in this section are more strongly targeted to the implementation of feedback information. The first activity provides an opportunity for students to develop a 'toolkit' of actions that can be taken upon receiving a particular piece of feedback. The second activity enables students to develop the ability to set action points and targets, and monitor progress towards them. The third and final activity in this section gives learners the opportunity to reflect on the relative role of the educator and student in the implementation of feedback.

Activity K1: The purpose and function of feedback

Learning objective: **To enable students to consider the many sources, forms and functions of feedback, and to develop a shared definition of feedback.**

Activity Guidance

The end point of this activity is the development of a working definition of feedback that is shared by students and the workshop facilitator. To achieve this, students should first be invited to consider responses to the following questions:

> What is the function of feedback? (for student, for lecturer, for university, etc.)
> What is feedback?
> From where and whom does feedback come?
> What effects does feedback have?

These questions should be considered by students individually, or discussed in pairs or small groups. Students then feed back their responses to the class and the workshop facilitator manages discussion, to develop a shared working definition of feedback that incorporates the students' responses to these questions.

Activity K2: Standards and Criteria

Learning objective: **To develop students' assessment literacy through discussion and application of marking criteria and standards.**

Activity Guidance

The workshop facilitator should begin by leading a discussion focused on the marking schemes/grading criteria that are used to assess students' work. Particular emphasis could be given to:

> Explaining the grade descriptors (e.g. differentiating 'good', 'very good', 'excellent') and how the expectations differ between grade boundaries

> Explaining individual criteria that are mentioned in the marking schemes, and which the marker takes into account when assessing work

> Explaining the weighting of different criteria in the grading process (for example, the relative importance of spelling/grammar versus critical evaluation)

Following this discussion of marking criteria and how they are applied, students should be given a copy of an exemplar assignment. Either individually or in pairs/small groups, they should be instructed to read the assignment and then use the marking scheme/grading criteria to decide what grade they would award it. This can be done either by assigning a specific grade, or just placing the assignment within an appropriate grade-band. This exercise could be done using standardised marking sheets/feedback pro formas, to allow the student to fully take the position of a marker.

Students should then share the grades they have awarded. This could be done anonymously so that students do not adjust their mark to fit with what others propose. Students should also discuss what they felt were the strengths and weaknesses of the exemplar assignment. The facilitator should then lead a group discussion around the possible reasons for any discrepancies between the marks of different individuals/groups, and reaching a consensus on what would be an appropriate grade for the work. Any misunderstandings or areas of confusion should be clarified. After the workshop, students could be encouraged to apply what they have learned by self-assessing a draft of their own work using the grading criteria/mark schemes.

Activity K3: Feedback as a learning resource

Learning objective: **To provide students insight into what can be learned from the process of using feedback, and to understand how feedback is a tool for learning, in the same way as a lecture or tutorial can be.**

Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a discussion of feedback and how it might contribute to learning (unless already covered in Activity K1). Each student should receive a copy of Resource K3, which lists possible actions that a student could potentially take after receiving feedback on an assignment. Students could work either individually or in small groups to consider each feedback action in turn, and suggesting what can be learnt from taking that action. For example:

Possible Action: Picking a few sentences from your assignment and thinking from the marker's perspective about how clearly those sentences are expressed.

> Examples of what might be learned from taking this action:
> What the marker might expect
> Common stylistic features of your writing that warrant attention
> How others might interpret your meaning differently to how it was intended
> That something that seemed clear to you may not be clear to others

Once the worksheet has been completed, students can share their ideas through a class discussion.

Activity B1: Feedback and identity

Learning objective: **To help students to appreciate that feedback comments can be interpreted differently according to the receiver's sense of learner identity.**

Activity Guidance

The workshop facilitator should begin by separating the class into groups, and providing each group with a piece of feedback (for example, the feedback provided in Resource B1). The groups should first be asked to read this feedback carefully, and to briefly discuss its strengths and weaknesses with the other members of their group.

Next, each group should be given a 'character profile' as illustrated in Resource B1. Each of these profiles describes a different person along with information about their learning approaches, and character traits relevant to their learning such as their self-confidence and motivation. The students should ideally be unaware that other groups have received different 'characters'. Groups should be asked to discuss how the person described in their character profile might understand the piece of feedback, and importantly, to discuss what that person might infer about themselves on the basis of the feedback comments. Groups should then be asked to feed back their ideas to the class. The workshop facilitator should lead a discussion of the discrepancies between groups' responses, revealing that each group received different character profiles. Students should be asked to consider why the character profiles would lead to different interpretations of the same feedback. The students might then be encouraged to reflect on what they would infer about themselves if they received that piece of feedback, and to discuss how these reactions relate to their learner identities.

Activity B2: Overcoming barriers

Learning objective: **To enable students to consider the factors that prevent them from engaging with feedback, and to develop an understanding of strategies to overcome these barriers.**

Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a general discussion about what makes using feedback so difficult. It might be useful for the facilitator to guide discussion, such that students do not solely focus on criticising the feedback they receive. Features of the feedback may be one of the barriers to implementing it, but students should be encouraged to think more broadly about the potential factors that might make it difficult to make use of feedback.

Next, students should be divided into groups, and each student given a copy of Resource B2.The facilitator should explain that these are quotes from actual students, when talking about their experiences with feedback. In their groups, students should discuss the quotes and extract commonalities between them. Ideally, students should try to generate four broad themes of barrier to using feedback, and sort the quotes into these groups.

Each group then feeds back their themes to the rest of the class. It might be useful to discuss differences between the themes extracted by each group. The session could then conclude with a discussion about potential solutions that could be offered to overcome the barriers that have been identified.

Activity B3: Using emotion positively

Learning objective: To enable students to understand the importance of the emotions elicited by feedback, and to appreciate the role of emotion in driving their future development.

Students should bring along to the workshop a piece of written feedback they have received on their own work. They should be encouraged to read through the feedback in the workshop, and to select a few phrases that elicit (or elicited) emotions, either positive or negative. They should then attempt to critically reflect on how they feel, and on how they can use those pieces of feedback and their own feelings to help decide what to do differently next time.

It may be useful to discuss the functions of emotion in the process of receiving feedback, for example, *Even though reading negative feedback can be difficult, if we can sit with that feedback, it can really change the way we do things and can make us more independent as learners."*

Activity A1: The process of action

Learning objective: **To enable students to appreciate the importance of acting on feedback, and to reflect upon and share their strategies for putting feedback into action.**

Activity Guidance

The session should begin with a discussion of why it is important to act upon feedback. Students are then instructed to work individually, and write down a list of the things they do upon receiving feedback. These might range from simply reading it through to more proactive strategies such as keeping a list of common comments, or seeking guidance from a tutor or learning advisor. The facilitator should emphasise that students' lists will remain completely anonymous. The facilitator collects all the individual lists and shares the actions with the group, ideally by writing them on a whiteboard so that all students can see the list.

Next, divide students into groups and ask them to discuss the list of actions, and rank them in order from least to most effective, considering the reasons for their ranking. Each group then feeds back to the rest of the class. A useful topic for discussion is how those that had been ranked as least effective could be reframed to become more effective. Students could also be invited to reflect on whether they think they do enough with their feedback.

Activity A2: Identifying actions

Learning objective: **To enable students to develop a 'bank' of actions that they can take in response to feedback they receive.**

Activity Guidance

Students should be presented with a list of illustrative feedback comments (see Resource A2 for examples). The workshop facilitator should split students into small groups, and assign a few comments to each group. Each illustrative comment should highlight an area of practice in which a hypothetical student need to improve, and groups should discuss each comment and come up with a list of 'actions' that could be taken to improve on this area of practice. The students could can either write these directly into the spaces on Resource A1, or list their actions on a large piece of paper to facilitate sharing amongst groups.

For example, if the comment is '*you need to evaluate your points more thoroughly*', then possible actions might include '*make notes on points of evaluation as I am studying*; '*talk to my lecturers about what they are expecting to see in terms of evaluation*'; '*speak to a study advisor about strategies to improve my evaluation*'.

If students struggle to come up with actions, then the facilitator could scaffold the discussion by providing headings under which to list action points, such as '*things I can do in my own study time*'; '*people I could go to for further support*', '*resources I could use*', etc. Each group should then share with the whole class the action plans for the comments they received, and the workshop facilitator should encourage class discussion. At the end of this activity, students should be able to take away a 'bank' of actions they could consider taking the next time they receive similar feedback comments.

Activity A3: Action planning

Learning objective: To enable students to develop the skills required to create an action plan on the basis of feedback received on their work.

Activity Guidance

For this activity, students should be instructed to bring to the session a piece of feedback that they have received on one of their assignments. The facilitator should begin by explaining to students how effective action planning requires identifying a) the area that needs to be developed; b) what actions need to be taken to enable this development; and c) what information would be needed in order to evaluate whether those actions had been effectual.

Students should then be given a copy of Resource A3, and instructed to go through their own feedback individually, extracting around three areas that the marker has identified need to be developed. They should then complete the worksheet by thinking about how they could develop that skill, and how they will know that they have been successful in improving that skill. Before beginning this activity, it might be useful for the facilitator to go through an example with students.

Once all students have completed the worksheet individually, students can be invited to share the actions that they are planning to take. It is likely that many of the issues identified in the first column of the table will be common across students, so it may be beneficial for students to hear what actions others have considered to address a similar issue.

Resource K1: The purpose and function of feedback

What is feedback?

From where and from whom do you receive feedback?

What should be the benefits of feedback…		
… from the perspective of the student who receives it?	… from the perspective of the person who marks your work?	… from the perspective of your university?

DEFINITION OF FEEDBACK

Resource K3: Feedback as a tool for learning

Below is a list of things that you might do when engaging with the written feedback comments you receive. What might you learn about yourself, about your work, or about the marker, by taking each of these actions?

Action	What might be learned by taking this action?
Looking at the marking scheme, and trying to figure out how you could achieve the next level	
Identifying what targets you have been set by the marker	
Looking at the grade you received	
Picking a few sentences from your work, and thinking about how clearly those sentences are expressed	
Taking one aspect of your work, such as your evaluation or structure, and thinking what you could do to improve	
Looking through your feedback for all the things your marker has told said you did well	
Making an action plan based on your feedback, aiming to look beyond just your next piece of work	

Resource B1: Feedback and Identity

The following piece of feedback was given in response to a student's essay:

You covered quite a good range of material in your essay. However, you presented a lot of unreferenced arguments. You also relied too heavily upon secondary sources – review papers and book chapters that summarised the topic for you. The integration of material in this essay was good, but there was room for improvement in terms of the critical evaluation of the evidence. There was a tendency to accept other authors' claims as truth rather than to question and test them. You present some valid points of critical analysis but these are not always used to address the question. Clearly link these points of critique to your argument so that we know what implications they have for the conclusions we might draw. Should we adjust our perception with reference to the question on the basis of the evidence presented in a section? Your overall structure is clear but you need to work on your paragraph transitions. In many places, your argument can be difficult to follow because you move between different topics without clear signposting to the reader. The essay also contains a very large number of errors, and in many cases these are severe enough that your arguments do not make sense. There is no evidence that the material has been proof-read.

Character Profile

Sam is a second-year Undergraduate student. She/he got very good grades at college, but really worries about her/his performance at University. Sam is often desperate to learn every part of the lecture material, and often does a lot of extra reading for an assignment, but finds it difficult to integrate everything. This causes Sam to panic, and every draft of every essay always feels as though it is rubbish. Sam hates submitting work as it never feels good enough, and she/he is then worried during the whole time it is being marked. When a piece of work is returned, Sam is frightened to look at the comments, for fear of what they might say.

1. How might Sam interpret the feedback comments?

2. What might Sam think or feel about herself/himself as a result of receiving these

    comments?

Character profile

Sam is a second-year Undergraduate student. She/he got very good grades at college, and is really confident about her/his performance at University, being certain that she/he will get a First Class degree. Sam attends all lectures and tutorials but does not feel the need to take detailed notes, as this approach has always paid off in the past. Sam loves submitting work, as she/he feels that the work is of such high quality that the marker will be very impressed. Sam can hardly wait for marked work to be returned, and is excited to see what the marker has said about the work.

1. How might Sam interpret the feedback comments?

2. What might Sam think or feel about herself/himself as a result of receiving these

    comments?

Resource B2: Overcoming Barriers

These comments are taken from Focus Group discussions with students, about their experiences with feedback, as reported in the following paper:

Winstone, N., Nash, R., Rowntree, J., & Parker, M. (in press). "It'd be useful, but I wouldn't use it". Barriers to University students' feedback seeking and recipience. *Studies in Higher Education.*

If the marker tells me that parts of my argument are hard to follow I wouldn't know which bits were hard to follow, and which bits I need to look at to see why it wasn't quite right. This might be quite tricky to find yourself, as obviously you've written it, so you think it's alright.
If I need to improve the structure of my work, I need more teaching. It's something that's innate.
There are so many lecturers and so many subjects; I don't think I've ever got feedback that's been the same.
I get angry with my feedback. Like, I got a mark back the other day, on my last piece of coursework and I wasn't happy with it. I read what the marker had written and thought 'Oh well – that's your opinion!'
I think it is so hard to take on feedback on board, as you've got your own specific writing style and you're so stuck in your way.
Sometimes you don't know what to do with the comments. Although the marker might have made a valid point, you don't know where in your essay they want you to have done something.
I generally just take the mark as more important than the written feedback. I mean, the feedback is useful, but if I've got a mark of seventy, I don't really care what the feedback says!
When I was writing an essay, I probably wouldn't ever go back and look at the feedback I'd had before. Which is something I probably could do more.
It's horrible. The feedback you get is really harsh! And it's just like, 'Well, okay! I'm not looking at that, it's just negative!'
Sometimes feedback is written in really fancy language. They're just saying it in a really roundabout way rather than just 'You need to make clearer arguments'.
If I feel that feedback is generic to everyone, I just discard it. If I think its individual to me, I will read it and probably use it again.
I haven't spoken to lecturers before, but I know that you can do that, I mean they do offer feedback in that sense.
If there is feedback on something negative, but there's something clear enough that I can change, I would give it a lot of attention. But if it's something negative and really general, I feel like I can't change it, and I won't pay attention to it.

I should read it. And then have it out when I'm then writing the next bit of coursework. But realistically, I normally sort of skim over it. I suppose I do probably take in points from it, but then you kind of file it away with your coursework.

I think sometimes it can be a bit difficult to read your feedback in front of friends, because you quite easily make comparisons between you and other people.

I'm very careful to find out who's marking it and then I try to phrase my work in the way I think they want it.

When I get a piece of work back, I'm really bad, and I'm just like, 'Oh, that's my mark, put it away now.'

I get quite a lot of markers saying, 'You need to expand on this more.' And it's like, 'Well, if I expand on this, I'm going to have to lose something else. So, what should I lose?' Because it's sort of that balance, which can be quite frustrating.

I think markers expect us to read all of the feedback, but I don't know if they realise how little we understand the stuff that they say.

I hate when they say stuff say about your use of commas, because I have used commas, like I'm not stupid, I know how to use commas. Just say 'This could be clearer.' Don't say 'Your use of commas is not always appropriate.'

I know people, and they put on Facebook, 'I got a first! I'm so pleased!' And you think, 'Oh, I wonder how you did that?'

I think it's fine if markers make a critical comment, but then they need to make a suggestion how to improve the critique that they're making of my work. Otherwise I'm not going to pay much attention to it

I think for me it was mostly about the mark, rather than the details of the feedback that you got. I don't know, but that's what I talk about with my friends.

Feedback is too specific to that particular piece of work. I definitely wouldn't use it on another piece of work.

I usually get quite angry whenever I read feedback, because they say things like 'This isn't clear. I know what I'm trying to say, and I think 'What do you mean it's not clear, like, it's right there on paper!

Sometimes feedback says that there's a lot of errors, but it doesn't necessarily say which bits are errors and which bits aren't. So it's quite hard moving forward, I guess, as the feedback is just a bit too vague and non-specific.

I do tend to go pick up my coursework with one person but, like, there's a guy I usually sit next to in lectures, and I'll go and get it with him. But, he tends to do a bit better than me, so I think sometimes you don't really want to talk about your feedback.

Resource B3: Feedback and emotion

Read through a piece of feedback that you have received. Pick out a few phrases that the marker has written. Try to reflect on your emotional reactions to these comments, and then think about their consequences: do these feelings help you in any way? Or do they have negative consequences?

Key message	What is my emotional reaction?	Is this emotional reaction helpful? Is it harmful? Or is it a bit of both?

Resource A2: Taking action!

You need to be more evaluative in your writing
Aim for a more coherent argument
Your writing could be more concise
You could achieve a better balance between description and evaluation
You can make stronger use of research evidence to support your argument
Your structure could be clearer
Check that your sentence structure is correct
Make sure that you are fully meeting the learning objectives for each assignment
Revise your understanding of punctuation and grammar
Make sure that you consider counterarguments to the positions you present
You need to ensure that a clearer answer to the question comes across to the reader
Try to use a wider range of sources to provide support for your argument

Resource A3: Action Planning

Target	What actions will you take to achieve this target?	How will you know you have achieved the target?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Feedback Portfolio

Contents

How to use the resources

Using one or more of the resources contained in this document, a feedback portfolio can be built in many possible ways. Each of the resources represents an individual 'page' that could be used either in isolation, within a broader paper-based portfolio, or as an e-portfolio implemented via a Virtual Learning Environment. The overall intention of the portfolio tool is for students to collate all the pieces of written feedback that they receive, and then through using the resources, to reflect actively on these feedback comments, to synthesise the commonalities across different pieces of feedback, to set targets for improvement, and to track their progress over time.

The resources are flexible, such that not all the 'pages' need to be included. Whereas the portfolio tool is designed to foster students' self-regulation and independence, we should not forget that dialogue is an essential part of the feedback process. The portfolio is designed to be completed independently by the student, yet it can also represent an anchor for dialogue with members of academic staff, particularly their personal tutors or mentors. Discussing the student's progress and reflection can be a useful way of reinforcing the benefits of constructing a portfolio, and the personal tutor or mentor may wish to provide the student with further feedback on these issues within the portfolio itself.

Reflecting on Feedback from an Assessment

Use this sheet to record and reflect on your feedback from an individual assignment.

Assignment:

Return Date:

What are the main messages from the marker?

Is there anything in the comments that you do not fully understand? If so, what?

How does the feedback make you feel?

Look at the comments telling you what you have done well. Consider why you have done these things well, and consider what you need to do similarly for your next assignment.

Look at the comments telling you what you need to do to improve. Consider why the marker has made those comments, and consider what you need to do differently for your next assignment.

Reflecting on Generic Feedback

Use this sheet to develop pointers for improvement from generic feedback that is directed to your whole class.

Sometimes, your lecturers will give you 'generic' feedback, where their suggestions apply to many of the assignments that were submitted, but not to everybody's. This sheet helps you to figure out how you personally can use this feedback.

1. In the left-hand column, list what you find to be the key points of advice from the feedback.
2. Next, have a look back at your own assignment, and think about the extent to which each of these pieces of feedback might apply to your work. Use the middle columns to self-assess your work against these points.
3. If you think that a particular point *does* apply to your work (even a little bit), then use the right-hand column to think about the actions you could take to ensure you can address this point in future. These actions might be specific (e.g., "*Proof-read my work before submitting it"; "Double-check how to reference properly*"), or might be longer-term things to work towards (e.g., "*Focus on developing my scientific writing style – book an appointment with my personal tutor*").

Feedback	To what extent might this feedback apply to me? (Tick the appropriate box)				What, if anything, could/should I do differently to ensure that I address this point in future?
	Not at all	*A little bit*	*Quite a lot*	*Entirely*	

Feedback	To what extent might this feedback apply to me? (Tick the appropriate box)				What, if anything, could/should I do differently to ensure that I address this point in future?
	Not at all	A little bit	Quite a lot	Entirely	

Reflecting on Feedback over a Term/Semester

Use this sheet to consider the key messages across the feedback you have received this term/semester.

Academic year:

Term/Semester:

Looking back over the feedback you have received this term/semester, what skills have you shown improvement in?

How have you used your feedback the help you develop these skills?

Looking back over the feedback you have received this term/semester, what does your feedback tell you that you still need to improve on?

How can you use your feedback to help you make these developments?

What do you most want to improve on next term/semester? How are you going to achieve this?

How well have you completed the action plan you produced after each assignment? Are there any outstanding actions you need to complete?

Synthesising Feedback

Use this sheet to pull together the information from your feedback over different assignments. For each piece of feedback you receive, extract the three most important things you think the feedback says about what you are doing well, and the three most important things you think the feedback says about what you need to do to improve. Are there any common messages coming from the different pieces of feedback?

Academic Year:

Term/Semester:

Assignment	What have I done well?	What do I need to improve?

Assignment	What have I done well?	What do I need to improve?

Action Planning Log

Use this sheet to develop an action plan to help you improve a particular skill. Identify what you need to work on, and think about all of the sources of information and support available to you. Then, set yourself three specific targets, and think about how you will know that you have achieved them. Will you be able to do something you cannot do now? Will you look for more positive feedback on that skill on your next assignment?

Date:

What skill do you need to develop?

What resources could you use to help you (e.g. books, websites, workshops)?

Who could you talk to for advice on how to improve this skill?

Target	What actions will you take to achieve this target?	How will you know you have achieved the target?
1.		
2.		
3.		

Personal tutor feedback

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Date:
FEEDBACK:

Tracking your progress

Use this sheet to keep track of your marks across different assignments.

Achieved grade

100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

Assignment number
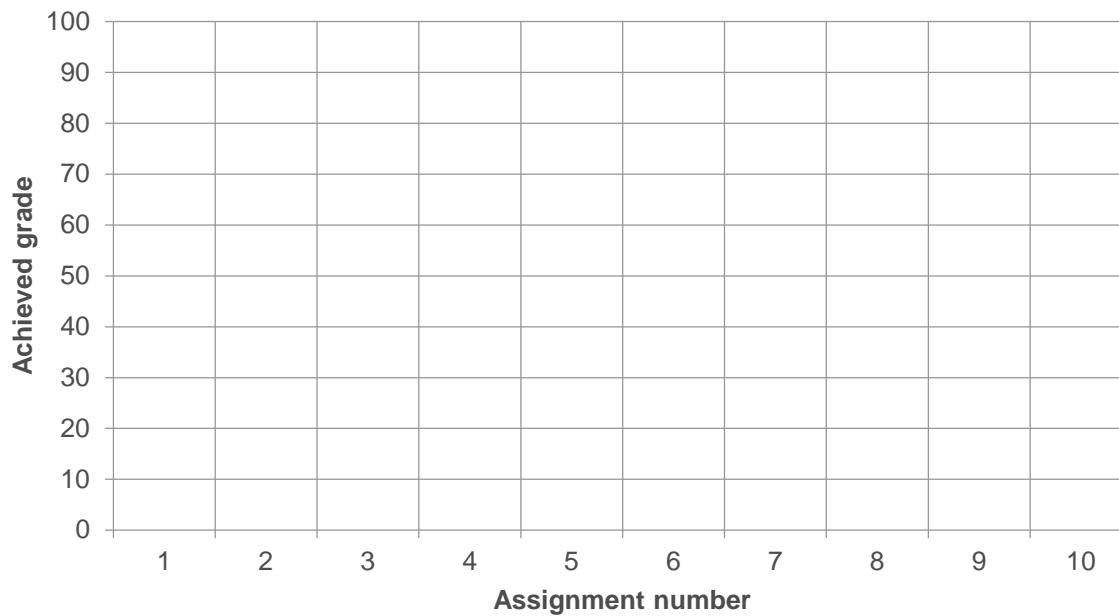
Reflecting on Progress and the Use of Feedback

Use this sheet to record the actions you took to implement your feedback and the effect of these actions.

Date:

What action did you take to implement a piece of feedback?

What was the outcome of this action? How has it enabled you to develop/improve?

What was difficult about doing this? Why?

Contact us

+44 (0)1904 717500   enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk
Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York, YO10 5BR
Twitter: @HEAcademy   www.heacademy.ac.uk