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Giving Meaningful Feedback

We spend a lot of time responding to student work. Ideally, we would like students to use our feedback to improve their performance moving forward. Here are ten tips to help you engage students with the feedback you provide:

Focus on development and measurement. Put simply, this means understanding the difference between formative and summative feedback, and pairing them when you respond to student work. Summative evaluation occurs at the end of an instructional unit, to *measure achievement*. Formative evaluation occurs throughout learning activities as a way to *monitor progression*.

Think quality over quantity. Students can sometimes feel overwhelmed if they receive too much feedback, or feedback that is too difficult to unpack without further guidance. Distil your feedback into a few suggestions that include specific instructions on what the student could do next.

Be impersonal and objective. Receiving feedback from an instructor can make students feel vulnerable. As an instructor, it's helpful to direct the comments at the assignment, rather than the student. In this way, you'll want to avoid phrasing such as: *You should have made the object foregrounded in your painting much brighter in colour.* Instead, speak about the work and how it can be improved: *I think you picked the right object to foreground in this painting. However, consider the effect it would have on your audience if its colour were brighter.*

Make feedback a timely and on-going process. Create opportunities to give feedback to students <u>throughout</u> the term, and set deadlines to return your responses to students so your feedback can be incorporated into their next assignment.

Refer back to the grading rubric. A rubric ensures objectivity in grading because it assigns a set of criteria to varying levels of mastery. When feedback refers to the rubric, students are reminded how their work meets or could better meet the requirements for the assignment or project. To learn more about rubrics refer to the handout, *Designing a Rubric.*

Offer a feedback sandwich. A good rule of thumb when providing feedback to students is to "sandwich" criticism between praise. For example:
- **Praise:** You did a wonderful job of choosing and explaining quotes that specifically support your thesis.
- **Criticism:** In the future, it would be best to avoid relying so heavily on textual evidence, and instead choose and explain 2-3 quotes per argument.
- **Praise:** It is great that you put so much thought into finding these quotes, and I am looking forward to seeing which quotes you'll focus on for the second draft of your artist statement.

Use questions when identifying errors. Some students might find questioning a more comforting way to receive feedback, and for some students, questioning might be the method that motivates them to take responsibility for their learning. Similar to a comment, aim your questions at a specific element of their work: *How does this drawing connect to*

your overall artist statement? How else might a designer and a painter approach this space differently? As a sculpture, might there be one or two more obstacles to consider?

Give your students take-away feedback. When giving oral feedback, make sure that the student is able to take notes, or inform the students that you will provide a written summary of your feedback for them. Typically, when students can take feedback away with them, they will be more likely to remember and use it.

Review feedback with students. It is common for students to experience an emotional reaction to the feedback you give them, and as such it is very important to either dedicate a class to reviewing feedback or provide students with the opportunity to schedule a time to meet with you to discuss your comments.

Use both written and oral feedback. Different assessment methods call for different feedback. After a presentation, you may give the student some informal feedback orally, and then provide a more formal written response. If you are using Canvas with your course, you might offer written feedback in response to an online discussion, but review your general feedback concerns aloud with the class. Whichever method best suit your needs, it is important to note how oral and written feedback are delivered differently:

Written Feedback	Oral Feedback
Write clearly and concisely.	Speak slowly and clearly, and make eye contact.
Restrict the feedback to the margins or a paper, or a one-page document.	Restrict oral feedback to 5 minutes, or audio / video tape critiques so students can hear your feedback and the feedback from their peers when they aren't also presenting their work.
Allow for a response from the student.	Allow the student to take notes if needed.
Invite questioning from the student.	Pause often to welcome questions.
Be sure to use a positive language.	Use positive language and be sure to smile.

What can you expect?
Providing students with feedback that has a meaningful impact on their learning requires you to put a significant amount of time and effort into responding to student work. Luckily, the more often you deliver constructive feedback to your students, the more opportunity you'll have to increase student achievement.

For more information, contact the Faculty & Curriculum Development Centre:

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