

FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT¹

What is the purpose of effective feedback on student assessments?

It is USQ policy that every assessment include some form of timely feedback to assist further learning. Effective feedback can be a powerful influence on student learning, by:

- reviewing and informing about progress
- enhancing student performance
- encouraging intellectual engagement
- building confidence
- promoting self-reflection, self-awareness and self-management of future improvements.
- explaining and clarifying performance standards
- identifying strengths and weaknesses
- correcting mistakes and omissions;

The form of feedback may vary depending on the nature, setting and timing of the assessment. For example, there may be differences between first year and later courses, large classes and small enrolments, assignments and examinations.

The design of course materials, teaching and assessment can determine a student's approach to learning and learning objectives (Biggs, 2003; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Ramsden, 1992). Student feedback, including USQ Student Evaluations, may provide course examiners with valuable information about student's perceptions of how well they attained such learning objectives.

What is effective feedback?

Effective feedback is:

1. provided as quickly as possible;
2. a deliberate teaching tool, which notes the quality of the performance and how it can be improved;
3. individualised and focused on the student's performance not on her or him as a person;
4. an integral aspect of each course;
5. able to clarify the criteria against which the student's performance is being judged and the standards for different levels of performance;
6. a qualitative commentary - a mark or a grade by itself is inadequate feedback, even with grade descriptors;
7. strategic - not too little, not too much- shaping student development, step-by-step over time. Students can be challenged without being overwhelmed.
8. a place to refer to skills, e.g., graduate, professional or academic skills;
9. a place to refer to disciplinary content and any intellectual debates with which students may need to engage; and
10. an opportunity to point beyond particular assessment tasks to assist performance of later tasks.

¹The ideas in this information flyer derive, in part, from the following article: Gibbs, G. & Simpson, C. 2004, Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Students' Learning, *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, Issue 1. pp. 3–31.

How to enhance student learning with feedback?

- Provide feedback on examinations to improve performance in the next exam. You can post a general report to all students on the course website, which includes the distribution of marks and sufficient information for students to understand where they did well and where they did poorly.
- Individual feedback on assignments may be supplemented by a general report that includes the distribution of marks, model answers, features of excellent performance, common mistakes or inadequacies, issues needing attention, and suggestions for action to address these issues in later assessments.
- Allocate marks to an appendix in second or subsequent assignments, in which students identify how they have addressed points for improvement based on earlier feedback.
- Assignments can be completed in stages, with feedback at each stage, and a grade only at the end. The final grade can be partly dependent on the incorporation of feedback.
- Self-assessment can be an adjunct to feedback processes that assists in focusing attention on the criteria and the expected standards. It also helps students to become self-directed and self-monitoring.
- Peer assessment can provide useful feedback from other students. The student could have right of reply and the instructor can act as moderator. Online alternatives are now available [see Technology Enhanced Learning exemplar from the Learning and Teaching website linked below]
- Online tests allow rapid feedback
- Electronic feedback offers opportunities to post a general report on the course website. Submissions can be shared among students and discussed through blogs and forums.
- Invite a member of LTSU staff to work with students to consolidate learning from feedback.

How to encourage student to use feedback?

- Design assessment schemes so that one assessment builds towards the next.
- Build students' self-assessment and critical reflection skills within curriculum.
- Include assessment items that ask students to reflect on their use of previous feedback.
- Make explicit in study activities the relationship between feedback in early assignments and completion of later assignment tasks.

Further support

Learning and Teaching website: <http://www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/>

References

- Biggs, J. B. (2003). *Teaching for quality learning at university: What the student does* (2nd ed.). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Prosser, M., & Trigwell, K. (1999). *Understanding learning and teaching: The experience in higher education*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ramsden, P. (1992). *Learning to teach in higher education*. London: Routledge.

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