

keying IN

VOL 29 | NO 2
November 2018

Giving Feedback That Feeds Forward: Practical Strategies for Greater Learning



Here's a quick quiz: Define feedback. Is it

- (1) advice?
- (2) evaluation?
- (3) grades?
- (4) all of the above?
- (5) none of the above?

The answer is (5): None of the above.

If that answer surprised you, you're not alone. Unless you've been trained in coaching, you might tend to think of feedback as "help" given to students in the form of advice, evaluation, and/or grades. And besides, it's common for adults seeking feedback themselves to look for evaluation, and sometimes advice.

So what is true feedback, why is it important, and how can you do it better so that it feeds forward into greater learning?

Information—Not evaluation, not advice, not grades

Strictly speaking, feedback is "information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal" (Wiggins, 2012).

Here are some examples: A novice runner sets her first race goal as a 10-minute mile, so she checks her stopwatch at the finish line and compares actual time to goal time. Your student wants to use the digital portfolio s/he created to compete in an electronic career portfolio event and uses event guidelines to decide how she must revise her project to meet the judging criteria. You deliver a presentation designed to engage your audience and notice that while some audience members are leaning forward, looking interested, others are letting their eyes stray to their smartwatches, checking their social media notifications.

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INbox

- **Tip:** Here's how students can follow up after they have a great interview—but haven't heard anything from the employer: <https://tinyurl.com/y9aurkkn>
- **Fun typewriter trivia:** Check out *California Typewriter* (<https://tinyurl.com/y9c7388s>), a film featuring Tom Hanks, Sam Sheppard, and others that focuses on people who love, collect, and repair typewriters.
- **Inspiration:** Create a lesson plan from a Ted Talk at <http://ed.ted.com/> (Courtesy Shelly Mowinkel, as noted in the NSBEA state newsletter, Spring 2014)
- **Coming up:** The NBEA 2019 Annual Convention in Chicago—where business educators get inspired. Mark your calendar: April 16–20, 2019. Register now at www.nbea.org

INside

- 3 "7 Characteristics of Effective Feedback"
- 4 CheckIN
- 5 Resources
- 6 "QuickTips for Doing Feedback Better"

Notice how, in the examples above, feedback is not evaluation (good/bad, like/don't like); not advice (do this/don't do that); not grades (summative assessment).

Feedback is the observed result (Wiggins calls it "the tangible effects") of efforts expended to reach a goal.

And so, true feedback is *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. It reflects what happened at a moment, or at moments, in time. *Prescriptive* feedback (what tends to be called guidance or corrective feedback, or sometimes constructive criticism) is appropriate, Wiggins cautions, only when information about progress toward a goal is received—and understood.

Teach less, feed back more

In the 2017 NBEA Yearbook chapter "Feedback: Helping Students to Improve," Dianna Briggs writes that research consistently ranks feedback as one of a teacher's top tools (Fisher & Frey as cited in Briggs, 2017) and as the strategy that perhaps more than any other impacts student learning (Hattie, as cited in Briggs, 2017).

Other researchers have taken that assertion further, stating that "by teaching less and providing *more* feedback, we can produce greater learning" (Wiggins, 2012).

Effective, corrective feedback

Effective, corrective feedback—the kind of feedback that feeds learning forward—has seven characteristics

KeyingIN is mailed quarterly—September, November, January, and March—by the National Business Education Association (NBEA), 1914 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1596; Tel: (703) 860-8300; Fax: (703) 620-4483; Home page: www.nbea.org; E-mail: nbea@nbea.org. Subscriptions are included in the membership dues; individual copies are \$5.00. Copyright © 2018 NBEA. Material may not be reproduced in any form without written permission from NBEA. Postmaster: Send changes of address to NBEA, 1914 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1596.

Publisher: Janet M. Treichel
Writer and Editor: Joanne Lozar Glenn



(Fig. 1). In a nutshell, though, effective corrective feedback has two basic parts:

1. It lets students know how they are doing (in relation to a goal) while there is still time to adjust and fine-tune their efforts.
2. It tells them what they could do to improve. (The Australian Society for Evidence-Based Teaching, n.d.).

There is a caveat, says Susan Brookhart, a Montana-based educational consultant who is also professor emerita, Duquesne University (Pittsburgh, PA):

"What you want for constructive feedback is the immediate next step [toward the learning goal]—not everything they should fix," she explains. "It contains information a student can hear and understand. And the important [thing] is that it comes in the part of the formative learning cycle when the student is on their way, they're learning, and they need to take a next step before some final judgment is made."

Elaborated vs. simple knowledge of results

Feedback on student work can take many forms, Brookhart points out, and some forms are more effective than others. "Less effective is simple knowledge of results: what you got right and wrong," she says. "What's more effective: Comments to criteria

the learner knew ahead of time, such as what a good example of what the learner's trying to do looks like."

She calls these comments "elaborated feedback," defined as comments that compare your work to specific, stated criteria. "Elaborated feedback is better than simple knowledge of results," she says. "The feedback is not just a comment, but a comment connected to criteria, and why the observed result meets or doesn't meet a particular criterion."

In her article "Feedback That Fits," Brookhart provides an extensive example of ineffective and effective feedback on a student's writing sample. The sample paragraph was to meet the following criteria: Make a point and contain a clear topic sentence, a clear concluding sentence, and at least three supporting details. So far, so good: The assignment is clear and criterion-referenced.

The ineffective feedback was simply a teacher's editing marks on the student's work. The teacher only gave feedback about the mechanics of writing—which was not the learning objective for the assignment. The teacher provided no feedback on why the edits were made, nor on whether the student had achieved the assignment's objectives. (Even if the objective was writing mechanics, Brookhart points out, a teacher's edits rob students of needing to do the intellectual work that ensures they'll learn those mechanics.)

Figure 1

7 characteristics of effective feedback

1. **Goal-referenced:** Does the learning have a goal? Before giving any feedback, ensure that the learner knows the goal and has performed an action to achieve the goal. Then give information about how effective that action was.
2. **Tangible and transparent:** What results did the actions used to achieve the goal get? Were those results consistent with the goal of the learning actions?
3. **Actionable:** Based on the results the learner got, what should the learner do more of or less of the next time to achieve the goal?
4. **User-friendly, i.e., specific and personalized:** Match the information you give to the learner’s level of understanding. A novice will need different feedback than someone who is more knowledgeable. What is the one important thing that, if changed, will likely allow the learner to achieve immediate and noticeable improvement in working toward the goal?
5. **Timely:** In most cases, the sooner feedback is given, the better.
6. **Ongoing:** Provide scaffolded, small-step, intermediate learning goals and feedback on each assignment or step of the learning process, so that the learner has multiple opportunities to adjust and improve performance toward a concrete, long-term goal.
7. **Consistent:** Be clear about what high-quality work is, and maintain those standards (using rubrics) “supported by anchor products and performances.”

Source: Wiggins, 2012

In contrast, the effective feedback commented on the student’s topic sentence and details. The feedback also offered a “next-step” constructive criticism, explaining what was needed for the writing sample to “make a point.” The teacher planned to meet with the student in a conference to demonstrate how to do this by strengthening the topic sentence (Brookhart, 2007/2008).

The case for conferencing

Though teachers can provide feedback in many modes—written, oral, demonstrations, etc.—Brookhart notes that some of the best feedback happens in conversations with students about their work. Questioning is often a good way to start.

For example, before commenting on a student’s work, you could ask the student what s/he notices about the work after having completed it, or whether s/he was surprised by

“What you want for constructive feedback is the immediate next step [toward the learning goal]—not everything they should fix ... And the important [thing] is that it comes in the part of the formative learning cycle when the student is on their way, they’re learning, and they need to take a next step before some final judgment is made.”

—Susan Brookhart

anything or even why s/he decided to do the assignment a certain way. This approach helps avoid the fallacy of assuming a student will understand a comment that you wrote. (Alternatively, if you provided written comments, you could start the conference by asking the student what s/he understands about your comments.)

“Then describe what went well and why you think so,” Brookhart says. “Ask students what they think needs to be improved, see how they understand it, and help them see what to do next.”

The perils of praise

A question that always comes up when discussing effective feedback, especially given the prevalence of the “feedback sandwich” model in business (a criticism “sandwiched” between two positive statements), is whether to use praise. Articles on “creating a positive classroom climate” abound in professional publications. It’s natural to associate positivity with giving praise.

Yet the value of including praise appears to be debatable among both researchers and practitioners. “Some studies have shown that praise interferes with students hearing the full message” (Hattie, 2012, in Briggs, 2017). “Strong praise may [even] prevent creative thinking if students become satisfied with their current performance and do not feel the need to strive to reach beyond that level” (Briggs 2007 in Briggs, 2017).

Ted Roggenbuck, director of the Writing and Literacy Engagement Studio at Bloomsburg University (Bloomsburg, PA) agrees, to a point. “Praise is one of the least effective [feedback] tools, especially empty praise,” he says. “‘Way to go’ doesn’t help. It’s vague, and vague makes students feel better and can contribute to developing a partnership, but it doesn’t move them forward or help them grow. But specific praise that shows a student something they’ve accomplished is very helpful.”

Specific praise highlights the importance of naming what’s working, which is the first part of bridging the gap between where the learner is and

Feedback continues on page 4

checkIN

What's the best feedback you've ever received?



The best feedback I ever received was from a graduating senior at my former high school. As the students walked through the door into their classroom where I was waiting, I greeted

them with a warm smile as they headed to their seats. Once the bell rang, I introduced myself and began my presentation on goal setting, self-motivation, and the importance of education. As I ended my presentation, a student raised his hand and said, "Thank you for your motivation and encouragement because I have something to strive for now." At that moment, I knew my purpose in life: to empower and inspire as many people as I can.

Alesia Ruffin
Montgomery Public Schools
Montgomery, AL



The best feedback came from my department chairperson in my first year of teaching. He encouraged me to read business professional magazines for new ideas to include in the

classroom. Don't spend all your time preparing and grading in the evenings and on weekends [he recommended]; figure out ways to grade during the class and assess students' work as soon as they finish the assignment. Giving immediate feedback not only helped the students but also helped me to determine what the students understood and what had to be reviewed. In my free time I could spend time reading NBEA/MPBEA professional journals!

Lynette Molstad Gorder
Dakota State University
Madison, SD



My first teaching job was at a junior/senior high school. During one of my annual evaluations, my high school principal stated, "I wished you would challenge ALL of your

students the way you challenge your FBLA students."

I set high standards for my FBLA students, and I EXPECTED their best!

After giving his comments serious consideration, I started revamping all of my courses. To my delight, I discovered that ALL students can achieve at a higher level if the students are encouraged and are given the resources to do so.

Sheryl Piening Keller
Southeast Community College
Milford, NE

where s/he needs to go next. But, believes New Jersey-based author-educator Patty McGee, "When feedback is paired with praise, it waters down the effectiveness. Saying just what the person has done—and the outcome—is more effective."

This is a technique McGee's colleague, Gravity Goldberg, uses in her educational consulting work. She calls it holding up a (metaphorical) mirror. "A mirror just reflects back what's in front of it," she says. Goldberg asks herself how she can do that when she's giving feedback to teachers she's observing.

"They are doing so many great things, but 'great job' is not helpful," she says. "So I just name all the things [the teacher] is doing."

She does not, however, use language like "I like" or "I noticed," because that puts the spotlight on the feedback giver rather than the feedback receiver.

"Be intentional about the language you use," she says, "and strive to use language that is neutral, observational, as objective as possible, and nonjudgmental."

Though you might worry that this approach is not "positive" enough, Brookhart says, "feedback will be perceived as positive if students can see what will make their work better and get a chance to use it."

Inspiring students to own their learning journeys

In a culture that's trained students to look to teachers for judgment and evaluation, how do you ensure that students begin actively soliciting feedback in the service of their own learning?

This is tricky but possible, even in middle school—and it comes back to good practice. "Ensure that students have learning goals," McGee says, "[so

that] learners completely understand the goal, why they chose it, what they need to achieve it, and what kind of feedback they need to achieve that goal."

In a school McGee was supporting in a consultant role, for example, a sixth-grade teacher said the fifth-grade students who had come to her asked "Where are the goals?" and "What are we learning here?" The sixth-grade

"Be intentional about the language you use, and strive to use language that is neutral, observational, as objective as possible, and nonjudgmental!"

—Gravity Goldberg

teacher didn't know what they meant, so she consulted their former teacher. "[She learned that] the fifth-grade units were organized according to learning goals," McGee says. "When the students got to sixth grade [and that structure wasn't there], they [were lost]. The goals had grounded the learning process."

Older students have a different issue—some are so invested in their identity as a "good student" that any feedback that identifies a learning gap is challenging to accept. New York-based executive coach Alexander Yaroslavsky encountered this situation recently in a course he was teaching. "It was demoralizing for [the student]. Fortunately, it happened early in the semester so she could regain her footing," he says. "Later she told me it was a valuable experience. She learned to think of feedback in a different way."

Bloomsburg's Roggenbuck explicitly tells his students to set their "most highly developed student identity" aside and to adopt the identity of someone a couple of semesters away from having their own classroom. "The goal is to concentrate on what you're ready to be able to do," he advises them. "As their mentor you want to connect to their goals...and convince them that feedback is helping them get to somewhere they want to go."

Assessing your skill at giving feedback

Like giving time to revise or to practice for a test, providing effective feedback is part of a learning journey, Brookhart says—which means there is a skill component as well as a knowledge component to doing it well.

"Be willing to look at the results," she recommends. "Did the work improve? If it didn't, something about the feedback wasn't effective. Figure out what those things are and keep working on it. It's partly a skill—and you get better at it with practice." ■

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"Praise is one of the least effective [feedback] tools, especially empty praise. ... But specific praise that shows a student something they've accomplished is very helpful."

—Ted Roggenbuck

Resources

General

- Susan Brookhart's *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students* (ASCD, 2017)
- John Hattie's work, specifically *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (Routledge, 2008) and *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* (Routledge, 2012)
- Rick Maurer's *The Feedback Toolkit: 16 Tools for Better Communication in the Workplace*, 2nd ed. (Productivity Press, 2011)

Discipline-specific

- National Writing Project College, Career, and Community Writers Program (C3WP) www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/doc/programs/crwp.csp
From the website: C3WP provides scaffolded teaching and formative assessment resources that support the development of students' argument writing and prepares youth for college, career, and community engagement.
- Gravity Goldberg's *Mindsets and Moves: Strategies That Help Readers Take Charge* (Corwin, 2015)
- Patty McGee's *Feedback That Moves Writers Forward: How to Escape Correcting Mode to Transform Student Writing* (Sage Publications, 2017)

Creative feedback tools and techniques

- Articles by Dianna Briggs ("Feedback: Helping Students Improve") and Melanie Tomaski and Colleen L.B. Webb ("Assessment at the Middle/Junior High and High School Levels") in the 2017 NBEA Yearbook *Assessment Strategies in Business Education*

Quick tips for doing feedback better.



Ensure that learners have goals. Without goals, feedback is so wide open it could be anything. With goals, we are zooming in on our finish line. **Plan your feedback as strategically as you plan your lessons.** Effective feedback is strategy based. You want to lead students step by step to what they can do based on the learning goal(s).

Create a safe, collaborative space. Sit alongside the person who is getting feedback and pay attention to tone and word choice—they make all the difference. If we leave out the word “but,” for example saying “You did this and now you’re ready to try this,” we create opportunity built on a strong relationship.

Patty McGee
Pattymcgee.org
NJ



Provide time in class to apply the feedback. Use actual lesson plan time so that students can ask you the questions that would come up when they’re taking that “next step” on their own. Most students really do want to know how to apply the feedback but are they really going to send an email or stay after class the next day to get that answer? Chances are, not.

Susan Brookhart
Susan Brookhart | Educational Assessment
Helena, MT



Pay attention to relationship and to how you scaffold learning. Feedback starts with the effectiveness of the assignment and the effectiveness of the [teacher]

establishing the learning relationship. Tasks have to be designed the right way before you ever get into giving feedback. **Be selective.** It’s a mistake to give feedback on everything, because that can be overwhelming as well as ineffective. Instead, focus on what you really want the student to take away. **Finally, involve students in processing the feedback.**

Student artifacts are never about the

product: They’re always about the process they go through. Think about how the successes in this draft or project connect to future or past tasks. Helping them notice change is good, or ask them how they’d do it differently next time.

Ted Roggenbuck
Bloomsburg University
Bloomsburg, PA



Be sure that student check-in (feedback) is I-R-S (immediate, regular, and specific). Devise an evaluation rubric to communicate your

expectations; the rubric becomes the “roadmap” to mastery of the concept. Check off the targets the student has achieved on the rubric. Remember to direct comments to **what the student did well, correct any misunderstandings by directing them to the correct answer/procedure/etc., and discuss the next steps in the students’ learning process.**

Colleen L. B. Webb
East China School District
Baker College (Retired)
East China, MI; Clinton Township
and Port Huron, MI



Get to know the person you’re giving feedback to. When I first start working with someone, I ask them their goals and how they like to get

feedback. Some people say “direct and clear.” Some say “I want to feel heard and seen.” And even if they don’t know how to answer the question...or ask “Just tell me how to do it right,” that tells you they haven’t been in the driver’s seat getting feedback before. So you may have to teach the person how to set intentions. **And consider “improving the way you give feedback” as a professional development goal.** Record and analyze your own feedback, or work with a colleague and analyze each other’s. Identify when [the feedback] is advice, cheerleading, or strictly observational. Practice giving people feedback on their feedback.

Gravity Goldberg
Gravity Goldberg LLC
Nyack, NY



Focus on the learning behavior—and when conferencing, make it a dialogue. Be descriptive rather than judgmental, and conduct a feedback conference as a dialogue, not a monologue. I couch my feedback into getting the competencies needed to perform and excel in a job. I also give an opportunity for students to respond—I want to hear their reaction.

David Kopp
Barry University
Miami Shores, FL



Enhance safety by keeping feedback private. If other students can hear the conversation between you and your student, there is no

opportunity for students to be vulnerable and ask questions. It can become a spectacle because people are curious. You don’t want that. Learning can only take place in a space of vulnerability. **When you have more students than time, try this:** Give the students questions you want them to answer privately ahead of time. The teacher reads and processes it and comes back with answers. The student can then ask for additional personal time to delve into any questions. **Be careful not to “get ahead of the train.”** Do you have a student who has “great potential” but is not performing, despite your excellent feedback? Maybe the student is not [ready] at that point in time because of other priorities. It’s a mistake when I want [progress] more than the student does. It creates a tension. When that happens, I breathe through it, realize that’s what’s happening, and am transparent about it. I tell the student “The reason I am so excited is because I see your potential.” Maybe that is the one thing that will stay with them. **Finally, be comfortable with confronting, pausing, and silence.** That’s where the growth takes place.

Alex Yaroslavsky
Yaro Group
New York, NY

Transitions column coming to the *Business Education Forum*

Share your news about

- a position or career change,
- retirement,
- or other significant professional transition



with your fellow NBEA educators in the Forum's forthcoming "**Transitions**" column. Here's how:

1. Write your news in an email, using third person, in 50-100 words. Here's an example: *Todd James was promoted to Dean of the International Business School at XYZ University, city, state....* [and include relevant important details you'd like to share about the transition].
2. Make sure to include your
 - name
 - name of your school, city, and state
 - (and country if you are outside the U.S.).
3. Attach a professional head shot (jpg format, high resolution, 300 dpi).
4. Use the header: **Forum Transitions.**
5. Send your email to jlj@joannelozarglenn.com

Note: These announcements will be published once annually as space (or deadline) permits and at the discretion of NBEA editorial staff.

Deadline dates: July 1, September 1, November 1, and January 1 for the October, December, February, and April *Business Education Forum* issues respectively.

New and coming soon to *Business Education Forum*: Toot your own horn!



Share your good news about

- a significant honor,
- an accomplishment (yours or your students'),
- a career milestone, etc.,

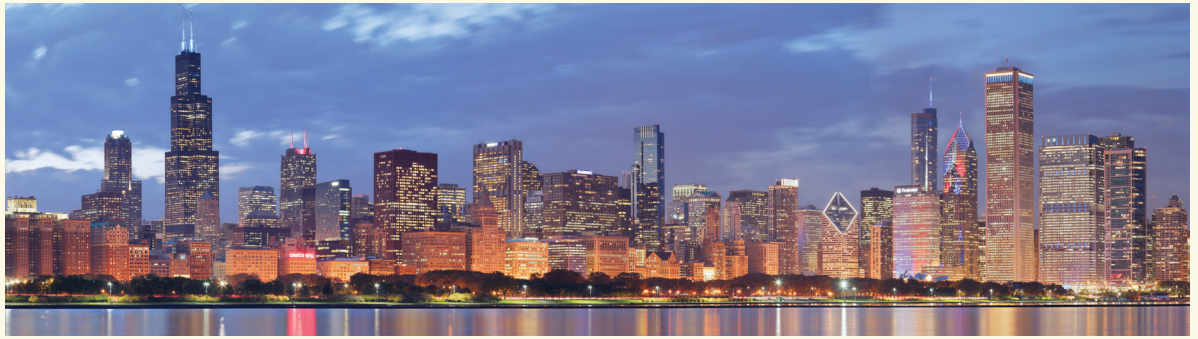
with your fellow NBEA educators in the Forum's forthcoming "**Shout Out**" column. Here's how:

1. Write your news in an email, using third person, in 50-100 words. Here's an example: *Tracy Shaw (name of school, city, state) received her city's Inspirational Teaching Award for "Minding Our Business," a podcast her students launched to feature the work of student social entrepreneurs. To date the students have created 50 programs and have been interviewed about their podcast on their local CBS news station.*
2. Make sure to include your name, name of your school, city and state (and country if you are outside the U.S.).
3. Attach a professional head shot (jpg format, high resolution, 300 dpi).
4. Use the header: **Forum Shout Out.**
5. Send your email to jlj@joannelozarglenn.com

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NBEA returns to Chicago's Magnificent Mile for the NBEA 2019 Annual Convention, April 16-20, 2019. The Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile, on Chicago's famous Michigan Avenue, will serve as the location for the NBEA 2019 Convention. World-famous shopping, dining, museums, theaters, and sporting events await you, so plan to come early and stay late so you can experience all that Chicago has to offer.

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- Teaching Stress Management & Coping Skills for Students
- Preparing High School Seniors for College
- Community College Forum
- Data Analytics—A Key to Success in Business
- Strategies for Creating Rubrics
- Integrating CTSOs into the Classroom
- Coping with the Aftermath of a Crisis or Traumatic Event
- Entrepreneurship
- Soft Skills
- A Business Plan for Leadership
- Ethics
- Resources for Teaching Social Media
- Collaborative Digital Tools for the Classroom
- Financial Literacy
- Business Communications—Don't Forget to Add the Basics
- Technology Strategies
- Strategies for Teaching Difficult Concepts in Accounting