



Feedback - Make it work for you!

Three steps to get the best out of feedback

Step 1. Get ready for feedback

- Find out what sort of feedback you will be getting on your module assignments: will it be written, verbal or online?
- Who will be giving feedback on your assignments: the module leader, your tutor, other students taking the module?
- When will the feedback be given?

If this information isn't clear from the module handbook, ask your module leaders or lecturers – they are there to help.

- Feedback on your ideas and ways of approaching your assignments may be given during tutorials or class discussions. Be there to receive it!

Step 2. Understand feedback

- Read or listen to it carefully and think about how it applies to your work or ideas.
- Think about how it relates to the assessment criteria.
- If you get written feedback which is hard to read let your tutor know – they may not realise their writing is illegible.
- If you don't understand your feedback ask! Feedback should be a dialogue. Be prepared to ask your module leader or your personal tutor about it.

You can't use your feedback if you don't understand it!

Step 3. Use your feedback

- To think about what you have done well and what you can improve in your work.
- To plan a subsequent piece of work.
- To prepare work in other modules. Feedback given on one module is often relevant for another. For instance feedback on researching your ideas or giving a presentation will probably be as useful for assignments in Year 3 as it was in Year 1.
- To develop your understanding of your subject.
- To think about your future!

This Short Guide is adapted from the leaflet "Feedback - Make it work for you!" produced by the ASKe Centre for Excellence for Teaching and Learning at Oxford Brookes University.

What IS feedback?

Feedback myth 1 – Feedback just explains your grade... it does more than that!

Feedback can be about

- Your individual assignments;
- Group work – this might be feedback on the finished product of group work or the process of group work. It might be given individually or to the group as a whole;
- Your practical skills – you might get feedback during practical sessions or fieldwork on your practical skills from demonstrators or academics supervising the practical. It's also an opportunity for you to ask for feedback on your practical skills;
- A draft you have prepared – you might get comments on, or talk to your tutor or supervisor about your draft dissertation or final year project write-up. Likewise you might ask a friend to read over a draft of an essay, poster or presentation and give you feedback; and
- Your ideas about your subject – discussions in tutorials or with others on your course can give you feedback on your subject knowledge and help to clear up misconceptions. Likewise feedback on, for example, an essay might point out errors in your understanding of your subject or encourage you to look into a topic more deeply.

Good feedback can help you to...

- Self-assess your work against assessment criteria;
- Work out what you have done wrong in an assignment – such as errors in subject knowledge, misunderstanding the question or how the format could be improved (e.g. using less text on a poster);
- Improve your future assignments – don't just get the feedback and then forget it;
- Understand your subject better;
- Approach work in new modules – if you have done something similar before, think back to the feedback you received and consider how you could apply it in new situations; and
- Feel better about your work - it isn't all negative!

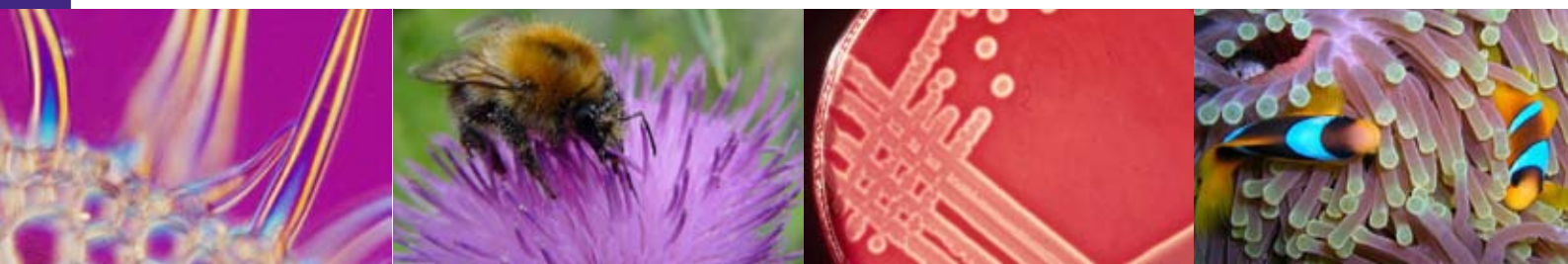
Feedback comes in many different forms including:

- Written comments on your work – you might get written comments on your work, or you might get feedback for the whole class – a list of common errors and things done well;
- Verbal comments about your work – sessions or meetings in which you can discuss your work with your tutor or the module leader. Verbal comments could be in-person or perhaps as a podcast or video;
- Comments made during discussions – perhaps in tutorials, or a group work session;
- Comments made in online debates – if you have online discussions as part of a module you might get feedback from peers and lecturers; and
- Your grade or mark – although on its own this won't tell you about what you did well and where you need to improve. You might find a lecturer gives you feedback before giving you your mark so you pay attention to your feedback and make use of it to improve your work.

Feedback myth 2 – Feedback is just a set of instructions... it is meant to make you think!

Feedback can come from different people

- Module leaders / lecturers – may provide you with feedback on your coursework, or module exams;
- Tutors – you may get feedback in a tutorial or be able to arrange a time to talk to your tutor. Your tutor might be able to give you general feedback about your work, specific feedback about a tutorial assignment, or perhaps feedback on your exams;
- Fellow students – you could get feedback from fellow students in a variety of ways, for example informally over discussions in a tutorial or lab session. This feedback could also be formal; you might be asked to give comments on presentations or posters, or asked to peer-assess a piece of work. Perhaps if you are doing group work you could get peer feedback not only on your work but on your role within the group; and



- Demonstrators – you could get feedback on your practical skills and techniques, for example finding out if you're using equipment properly or measuring results accurately. You might want to ask for feedback on your lab book – are you recording everything you need to? This also applies if you are doing fieldwork – are you using techniques correctly, are you recording all the observations you need to?

Feedback myth 3 – Feedback applies to just one piece of work... it can apply to all the work you do!

Feedback can be formal or informal

Formal feedback could be what you receive in a discussion with a lecturer about a specific assignment, or comments on an essay you have submitted. Informal feedback could be that quick chat you had with your tutor in the corridor about how your dissertation is going, or talking to a demonstrator about how to improve your practical skills.

Feedback myth 4 – Feedback only comes after a piece of work is completed... you might be able to get feedback on drafts before you submit.

What should I do with the feedback I receive?

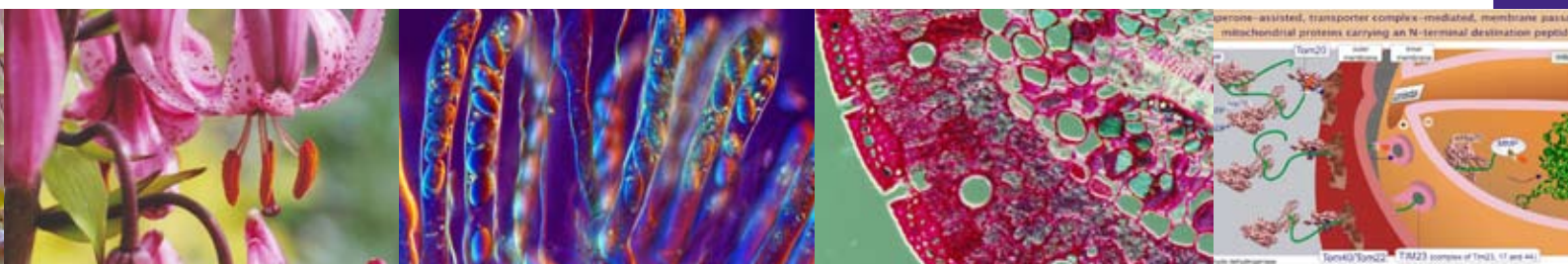
- If you've done something well, make a note of it and do it in your next assignment!
- Come back to it later. If you've done very well, or not as well as you hoped, you might not take in the feedback you've been given;
- Keep it somewhere safe and go back to it when you undertake your next assignment. You might want to take time to reflect on what you did, explore how you could improve, and perhaps put together a plan of things you will do again and things you definitely won't do again;
- You might find it useful to divide feedback into "major" and "minor" points. Minor points might be things such as spelling mistakes, errors with punctuation, things where more care and attention in your next assignment would help.

Major points might be misunderstanding a theory or referencing incorrectly, things you might need to spend more time researching before your next assignment;

- If there is something you don't understand – what a particular comment means or is related to, arrange a time to talk to whoever gave you the feedback; and
- Compare it to the marking scheme for the assignment – look at where you did and didn't meet the criteria and take that forward to your next assignment.

Do you ever give feedback?

- **Feedback to yourself** – you might have the opportunity to compare your assignment to other student's work, either past students or your friends. Try to identify what they have done well and how you might integrate that into your own work.
- **Feedback to your peers** – make it useful! Saying something is "terrible" or "fantastic" doesn't help anyone. Be constructive, if something was done well or needs improvement, say why. Try also to direct your comments at the work not the person. For example, "This paragraph might be clearer if X came before Y" is more helpful than "You didn't do this paragraph very well".
- **Feedback to your teachers** (e.g. lecturers, demonstrators) – again try to be constructive, what should they change, what should they keep doing, what should they start doing and why?
- **Feedback on modules** – filling in a module evaluation form or completing the National Student Survey may seem like a chore and it may feel like your responses disappear into a black hole never to be seen again. Your course leaders and department do take notice of them and do try to act on your feedback. Unfortunately you might not get to see the changes if they are put in place after you have finished a module or your degree, however you might be benefiting from the feedback given by last year's students. Or feedback you give on one module could be used to improve other modules you take in the future.



Resources

Feedback

Resources from Phil Race on **assessment, studying and making the most out of feedback**. <http://phil-race.co.uk/students/>

Using feedback, a guide from Loughborough University. www.lboro.ac.uk/service/ltd/campus/feedback.pdf

Using feedback well, guidance from the University of Wolverhampton. <http://tinyurl.com/wlvfeedback>

Making full use of the feedback you receive from the University of Nottingham (under the “preparing yourself” section). www.nottingham.ac.uk/pathways/

Ten principles of good feedback practice from the NUS. <http://resource.nusonline.co.uk/media/resource/HEFocus.pdf>

Using feedback from the University of Sussex, covers written, oral and peer feedback and how you can use it. www.sussex.ac.uk/s3/?id=57

Online study guides and study sites

Many universities and colleges produce online study guides or study skills websites to support their students. Listed below are a few that you may find useful.

- University of Leicester, www2.le.ac.uk/offices/ssds/sd
- Skills@Library from the University of Leeds, <http://skills.library.leeds.ac.uk>
- University of Manchester, www.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/studyskills/

Engage – a website which aims to support you with the key aspects of designing and carrying out a research project. From developing a hypothesis and writing a literature review, to step-by-step statistics and scientific writing. www.engageinresearch.ac.uk

Writing skills from Monash University has guidance on writing in the sciences, including writing lab reports and writing for a poster. There are also some examples of student essays with feedback. www.monash.edu.au/lis/lionline/writing/

Support for your studies from the LearnHigher CETL has information and guidance on a number of study-related topics, including group working, note taking, numeracy, maths and statistics, and report writing. www.learnhigher.ac.uk/students.htm

Resources from the UK Centre for Bioscience

This Short Guide is one of a series from the UK Centre for Bioscience, other Guides include:

- Assessment
- Making the most out of practical work
- A bioscience degree, why and what next?
- Advice for students starting their bioscience course

All the Short Guides can be downloaded from: www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/resources/studentguides.aspx

Our **student pages** bring together resources for bioscience students from the Centre and other organisations. With resources to get you thinking about your future career and the skills a bioscience degree can give you to resources to support you in your studies. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/network/students/

Need to illustrate your posters, lab reports or presentations? **ImageBank** brings together thousands of copyright-cleared bioscience images. www.bioscience.heacademy.ac.uk/imagebank

All the images in this Short Guide are available in ImageBank.

