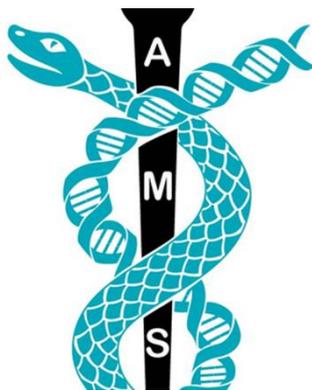# Assessor's Guide to Providing Quality Feedback

BSc/MSci Applied Medical Sciences

Assessor's guide to providing quality feedback.

BSc/MSci Applied Medical Sciences.

There is a desire across UCL, including the BSc/MSci AMS programme, to provide students with higher quality feedback. This document contains some useful hints and tips on providing quality feedback, which aims to enhance the feedback Applied Medical Sciences students receive in line with UCL, UCL Arena, Higher Education Academy and NUS guidelines.

How to support effective learning.

1. Help students to clarify what good performance is (goals, criteria, and standards).

2. Help students learn how to direct their own learning.

3. Provide students with opportunities to act on feedback.

4. Provide high quality information.

5. Provide positive motivational beliefs and self-esteem.

6. Cultivate a cooperative and collaborative environment.

Dos and Don'ts of feedback.

Do's	Don'ts
1. Focus feedback on the task.	1. Give normative comparisons.
2. Be specific and clear with feedback message.	2. Give feedback that discourages the learner.
3. Keep feedback as simple as possible based on student's needs.	3. Provide progressive hints that terminate with the correct answer.
4. Give unbiased and objective feedback.	4. Use extensive error analysis (e.g. typos, spelling, and grammar).
5. Promote 'learning' rather than 'performance'.	5. Provide feedback the student isn't going to read.
6. Provide feedback in a timely manner so that students can use it.	6. Focus on the negative rather than the positive.

** This may be particular salient for science subjects as the student is expecting to receive feedback on his or her subject content and ideas. They will be disappointed if they receive feedback on mechanics or language error. It is better to provide feedback on content rather than grammar.

How we can provide quality feedback?

There are many attempts in the literature to define what makes good quality feedback and to implement it. There are no correct or incorrect solutions and assessors need to find their own way of providing quality feedback that best suits them and their module content and/or assessment method. Below are two example systems that use simple criteria to provide feedback (they are not mutually exclusive!).

Option 1 – the PQR system.

1. Praise

2. Question

3. Revise

This is an excellent way of composing good quality feedback for written assessments such as SAQs, essays, blogs etc. (This could be particular useful for MCQs, which are notoriously difficult to provide quality feedback on).

Option 2 – Directive versus Facilitative.

This is about providing students with the opportunity to take responsibility over their own learning, without having to defer to the expert opinion of their tutors.

1. Directive – showing the student precisely where they went wrong and what they can do to improve.
2. Facilitative – asking questions and making further suggestions, or providing cues and guidance.

There is no right or wrong method but evidence suggests that **facilitative feedback** is much better at engaging students with the topic and allowing them to think about the problems at hand.

Examples:

Directive: 'You need to discuss how cholera causes water loss in the gut.'

Facilitative: 'Have you thought about how cholera affects water loss in the gut? Where might you find this information?'

Types of feedback.

These examples are in no particular order but I have highlighted some of the feedback options that students find most useful and the ones that I would encourage to use more of. I have also added in parentheses the sort of feedback options that should be kept to a minimum, as students often find these less useful or are considered ineffective at promoting learning and development.

1. **Correcting** - highlighting simple errors.

E.g. typos, grammar, punctuation. (Use minimally as these do not help to develop reflective learning)

2. **Commanding** - do's and don'ts.
   E.g. 'Don't start a sentence with And.' (Use minimally).

3. **Evaluating** - assessing the fullness of an answer.
   E.g. 'This paragraph is incomplete.' (Try to provide a reason why you have highlighted such an issue.)

4. **Suggesting** - offering additional advice.
   E.g. 'Try to include a brief overview of the topics of the essay in the introduction?'; ' Have you thought about including more detail on the role of toxins in chronic kidney disease?'

5. **Explaining** - commenting on clarity, objectivity and descriptive content.
   E.g. 'Try to avoid generalisations such as magnificent or incredible.'; 'This is someone's opinion, have you considered other's opinions?'

6. **Criticizing** - negative judgements.
   E.g. 'Wrong!'; 'Your English is difficult to understand'.
   (Use minimally. Try to give the reason **why** something is wrong)

7. **Praising** - encouraging remarks.
   E.g. 'Very insightful discussion, you put the research into context.'
   (Avoid 'Good! or 'Excellent introduction.' (These statements makes no clarification as to why.))

8. **Describing** - contextual comments.
   E.g. 'This subject matter is not relevant to the discussion on the causes of IBD.'

9. **Assigning** - comments that suggest additional content.
   E.g. 'Consider expanding on the role of macrophages in atherosclerosis.'; 'Add an example here.'

10. **Reminding** - connecting content to prior learning.
    E.g. 'A good example to use to clarify your point would be the material we covered in the tutorial on respiratory mechanics.'

11. **Emoting** - shared views on the subject matter.
    E.g. 'I agree with your analysis of the data.'

12. **Questioning** - applying questions.
    E.g. 'What would happen to cardiac output in a low oxygen environment? How does this apply to your argument?'

13. **Alerting** - use of symbols to indicate points.
    E.g. Tick marks, underlining, short-hand rubrics. (It is advisable to only use these minimally, as students often do not understand their meaning.)

14. **Focusing** - comments relating to relevance.
    E.g. 'You make good use of the relevant literature to explain spontaneous human combustion.'; 'Your argument drifts away from the main question of whether spontaneous human combustion is a scientifically proven phenomenon.'

(Modified from Burke and Pieterick, 2010, Open University press).

How do we teach our students to effectively use feedback?

Providing students with feedback is one thing but getting them to use and respond appropriately to their feedback is quite another. Here are a few hints and tips that you could use is order to engage students with the feedback that they receive.

How do we teach our students to effectively use feedback?
1. Students must understand the feedback.
2. Prepare students for the feedback they will receive.
3. Familiarise students with the 'type' of feedback they will receive.
4. Encourage students NOT to focus on the grade.
5. Remind students of the 'task' and learning objectives.
6. Help students to act on the feedback they are given.

There is a significant argument to employ a **skills tutor** that will help students to engage and understand feedback. You may also like to use the **'Working on Feedback'** form at the end of this guide, in order to encourage students to use their feedback more effectively.

How does this link to assessment?

Feedback is integrally linked to student assessment. Here are few things to consider when designing and implementing student assessments and how they should fit into the whole AMS programme.

Principles of effective assessment and feedback
1. Assessment should be diverse across the programme.
2. Assessment criteria should be clear, consistent and available to students.
3. Assessment workload should be fairly distributed.
4. Marking criteria should be consistent across the programme.
5. Feedback should be timely so that students can act on their work.
6. Feedback should be consistent across the entire programme.

Contacts

For further information or any other queries please contact either Dr Andrew Williams (andrew.williams@ucl.ac.uk) or Dr Steven Buckingham (steven.buckingham@ucl.ac.uk).

Using Feedback Effectively.

Read the feedback to have received carefully, then re-read the piece of work to see which areas of your work the feedback refers to. You might like to use a highlighter pen to cross-refer the feedback to your work, or to draw attention to corrections or suggestions.

What has your tutor written?	What do you understand this to mean?

Break the feedback down into	
Good points *(note these down so you can do them again)*	**Areas for improvement** *(consider and note down at least two areas for improvement)*

It is important to take note of both positive comments and comments referring to areas which need improvement.