



Giving Feedback

A natural function of learning relationships is the giving of quality feedback. However, in the busy world of medical education, where learning moments are often controlled by outside forces, i.e., patients, feedback sometimes takes a back seat. It should not.

Feedback helps learners evaluate their own performance. Such reflection is essential to quality learning. Feedback clarifies expectations. Such knowledge helps learners develop self-directedness. A system of regularly administered feedback encourages learners to try new skills: they can challenge themselves, experiment with new ideas, and receive guidance that helps them develop mastery before being graded. Feedback also provides an opportunity for the preceptor to show interest in learners' development. In this way, feedback facilitates communication and strengthens the instructor/student relationship.

Feedback is defined as information describing students' performance in a given activity that is intended to guide their future performance in that same or in a related activity. Sometimes confused with evaluation, feedback differs in important ways.

- Feedback is given as close to a given relevant event as possible
- Feedback is generally informal: brief sessions are fit in at appropriate times
- Feedback focuses on specific events or actions

Learners often report that they do not get enough feedback from instructors. This may be because learners do not always recognize when feedback is given. Consequently it can benefit the instructor to explicitly label comments as such: "To give you some feedback, I thought your case presentation was . . ."

However, most instructors should give more feedback than they do. When people are learning new skills, they do not have the experience or context for judging their own performance. Expert feedback is not only welcomed, it is helpful in the development of those skills.



Feedback ought to be a function of the instructor/student relationship. In other words, the better the learning relationship, the better the opportunity to give (and for the students to receive) feedback. Instructors are encouraged to become knowledgeable of their students so that their feedback takes on a more functional role. Plus, this just makes teaching more interesting.

An effective way to think about feedback is to focus first on the learner's present level of skill. Then bring to mind the objectives of the course or lesson, assess the nature of the performance, seek the student's input on performance, then deliver the positive feedback necessary to help the student improve. Feedback also requires a follow up by the instructor where a re-visitation of the same skills and objectives are discussed.

Generally, feedback is given directly to the student in a one-to-one situation. However, feedback can also be given in larger groups. When this type of feedback is delivered, it is important that the points made speak not just to the student, but to the skills being developed by the full group. Admittedly, this is a more difficult feedback to give, but it can be quite valuable as it links learning across learning styles.

When approached thoughtfully, giving feedback is one of the most significant tools in an instructor's tool kit. It not only helps learners achieve their goals, it improves the overall nature of the learning environment.