



How To Provide Meaningful Feedback

Practicing Professional Skills In University Classes

Just as quality feedback to you from your instructors helps you to learn more effectively, quality feedback from you to your professors can help them teach more effectively. Students have regular opportunities to provide valuable, influential feedback to faculty. Whether or not the feedback makes a difference can be dependent on whether it is quality feedback or not. This resource provides guidance on how to provide higher-quality feedback to your instructors, which can also enhance your skill providing effective feedback that will be useful in many future professional and personal situations.

Formal end-of-term course evaluations typically include quantitative feedback, where you can rate various aspects of the course and the instructor by selecting a number that reflects your perspectives. Many course evaluation forms also provide opportunities for you to comment in your own words in response to open-ended questions. Both can help your instructors to know what supported your success in the course and what did not.

The principles and examples below apply to open-ended feedback on course evaluations, but they can also be applied to other feedback episodes that you will encounter in professional settings (e.g., to a future employee or co-worker). In brief, feedback will be more effective when your comments:

1. Are more specific (vs. more vague)
2. Are based on observed behaviors (vs. based on inferences about behaviors)
3. Include positives (vs. providing just negatives)
4. Suggest alternatives (vs. no suggestions for improvement)

To illustrate what each of these characteristics looks like, the charts below provide examples of feedback that is less helpful contrasted with feedback that is more helpful on each characteristic.

1. Vague vs. Specific Feedback

<i>Less Helpful: Vague</i>	<i>More Helpful: More Specific</i>
This instructor was awesome.	This professor was awesome because they gave us lots of activities to do in the classroom which helped me REALLY understand what I was doing rather than remembering stuff for a quiz.
The course was disorganized.	The course calendar of topics and readings were changed several times and some deadlines were moved at the last minute.
This instructor was motivating.	This professor told us stories about how they collected data for their research and made me enthusiastic to want to do the same.
This course sucks.	I didn't learn as much as I could have because points and grades weren't posted online for weeks and so I didn't know what I needed to do differently or better to improve.

2. Inference-based vs. Observation-based Feedback

Less Helpful: Inference-based	More Helpful: Observation-based
This instructor doesn't like students.	The instructor talked at the classroom instead of to us and rarely encouraged us to ask questions or discuss topics. I would have liked them to check for understanding at certain points in the lecture.
The instructor was caring.	I really appreciated the way the professor was always there after class to answer questions and always responded to my emails – it showed that they cared about us as individuals.
The instructor was unprepared for class.	The instructor often appeared unprepared for class, such as when they had trouble finding the slide deck on the computer and sometimes forgot to bring the handouts.

3. Negatives Only vs. Positives and Negatives

Less Helpful: Only negatives	More Helpful: Positives and negatives
I had difficulty understanding all the jargon in the lectures.	There was lots of jargon in the lectures, although I appreciated that the instructor helped us to prepare a glossary of key terms that we added to week by week.
The lectures were too long and too dense to follow.	The lectures were long and dense, although it helped that the instructor posted the slides online to download for better notetaking.
The textbook was horrible – repetitive and hard to read.	The textbook was horrible – repetitive and hard to read. It helped that the instructor helped us sort out the important stuff in class.

4. No Alternatives Offered vs. Alternatives Offered

Less Helpful: No alternatives	More Helpful: Alternatives offered
The lectures were long and boring.	Instead of the instructor just talking in lectures I would have learned more with some group work to discuss ideas with our peers.
Assignments were not clear and often confusing about what we were doing.	Assignments were not clear and often confusing about what we were doing. If each assignment included information about why we were doing it, clear instructions we could follow, and how it would be evaluated, I think I would have learned more and done better.
The class was too hard.	The class was too hard because of how much reading we had to do. If the instructor were more selective about the pages assigned for reading and then help us figure out what was important to know we would actually learn more.